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LETTERS.

SOMETHING IN COMMON

New York City

The long and erudite discussions of Langston Hughes that I read in the magazines, including Nathan Irvin Huggins's review in *The Nation* of October 10 ["'Here to Stay'"] make nothing of the fact that he was gay. But both he and James Baldwin got through to many readers because they were gay. I don't mean because their readers had been told they were gay. I mean because their readers could tell they were gay—from their writings, from the sensibility expressed in their writings. Even nongay readers could tell this, as is evident from complaints that these writers don't adequately represent the black male. But mainly the gay sensibility worked as a positive factor—exactly as it did for Tennessee Williams. I think Baldwin was aware of this, though I found him unwilling to make any public statement when I asked him to make some retort to the insults of Eldridge Cleaver back in the 1960s. Possibly Langston Hughes was not aware of it.

Eric Bentley

HUGGINS REPLIES

Cambridge, Mass.

Langston Hughes's sexual orientation has been characterized, at one time or another, as various combinations or degrees of bisexual, homosexual and nonsexual. In his biography of Hughes, Arnold Rampersad is painfully exhaustive in his efforts to settle the question finally. He concludes that Hughes had no strong sexual orientation of any kind, which is not to rule out probable sexual experiences with women and men. If "gay" means a *practicing* homosexual, Rampersad is convincing that Hughes was not gay. Eric Bentley, however, implies something more (or other) than sexual practice: a kind of gay sensibility that can produce a shock of recognition within kindred as well as antagonistic spirits. It is an interesting theory about which I have no comment. *Nathan Irvin Huggins*

UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY

New York City

The Edward Sorel cartoon in the October 17 issue ["*Cinéma Vérité*"] condemning and lampooning the Helmsleys because they've been *indicted* indicates that civil rights principles may be thinly rooted almost everywhere. The presumption of innocence is not in high fashion these days. Prosecutors, newspaper and TV pundits and others trumpet that the issuance of an indictment has "broken" a crime ring, "exposed" widespread fraud or otherwise condemned the defendants without a trial. One hopes for more from *The Nation*. Like you, I haven't the slightest idea if the Helmsleys are guilty. Unlike the cartoonist, I've been trained and persuaded to withhold judgment until or unless a jury has found them guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

While I continue to be a faithful reader, that role will be easier if you extend the apology you owe to the Helmsleys and all the rest of us. *Marvin E. Frankel*

SOREL REPLIES

New York City

I'm grateful to Marvin Frankel for his lesson in civic responsibility and for not mentioning an even more painful truth: The cartoon wasn't funny. *Edward Sorel*

ORGANIZING CHINATOWN

New York City

In their letter [Oct. 10] addressing the article "How the Other Half Lives Now," by Peter Kwong and JoAnn Lum [June 18], Randy Wei, Alice Ip and May Ying Chen turned history on its head when they accused the independent unions of Chinese restaurant workers of being "divisive" and "out of touch with reality." The independent movement developed outside the A.F.L.-C.I.O. in response to the insensitivity of its unions to the plight of Chinese restaurant workers, most of whom are working sixty hours a week at below minimum wages and without any medical benefits or job security. Ninety-nine percent of the Chinese restaurants in the city remain unorganized today. The fact that unions like the independent 318 Restaurant Workers Union are needed is an indictment of the mainstream unions for their neglect of these workers.

The Chinese Staff and Workers Association has always supported the independent unions in the Chinese restaurant industry, not as a substitute for A.F.L.-C.I.O. unions as Wei & Co. imply but as a vehicle to promote the participation and the organization of workers at the grass-roots and rank-and-file level. Independent unions can play a crucial role when traditional unions fail and are important tools in building a strong workers' movement. To say that the independent unions and their supporters are "aiming their fire at the International Ladies Garment Workers Union" is a vicious concoction. In fact, the C.S.W.A. was one of a handful of Chinese organizations that openly supported Local 23-25 of the I.L.G.W.U. in its contract struggle in 1982. While the bosses portrayed the issue as one between the Chinese community and invading "foreign" unions, C.S.W.A. was the only voice in Chinatown that pointed out unequivocally that it was a matter of Chinese employers exploiting their own kind.

On the other hand, we believe that in no way should the workers' movement be straitjacketed by the A.F.L.-C.I.O. unions. And for these unions (and any union, for that matter) we would not hesitate to criticize when criticism is due. Wei & Co. erred when they equated criticism with the rejection of unions. A union can become strong through constant vigilance and organization on the part of its members.

Both Wei and Chen worked for Local 100 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union before moving on to the I.L.G.W.U. (presumably for greener turf). First they stand on the sideline in Local 100 when Chinese restaurant workers are fighting on their own. Now they turn around and insult the workers for their good efforts. Can they please tell us which side they are on?

The issue of workers' initiatives and participation is an important one for the labor movement. This question and its relation specifically to Chinese restaurant workers and independent unions cannot be fully addressed in this letter. More coverage of this issue is clearly called for. *Wing Lam*
Program Director
Chinese Staff and Workers Association

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

Oxford, Ohio

A word on, shall we say, political grammar. In your excellent editorial "False Choice" [Nov. 7] you speak of "anti-Semitic comments by some blacks and racist remarks by some Jews." Well and good: a nicely balanced construction and perfectly clear in context. Unfortunately, it makes "anti-Semitic" and "racist" sound antithetical. They aren't. The most pernicious form of anti-Semitism, Nazism, was racist to the core.

That anti-Semitism is a form of racism is something we forget to our cost, especially if we are blacks or Jews. There was a "relatively harmonious" alliance "enjoyed by many blacks and Jews during the civil rights struggles of the early 1960s" in part because many blacks and Jews recognized the essential unity of racism.

My first memory with words is coming home from school and asking my mother the meaning of a word I'd heard—"nigger." She told me the meaning and told me not to use it. When I asked why, she looked at me and said, "For now let it go at this: If the first word out of a man's mouth is 'nigger,' the next word will be 'kike.'" Jews who succumb to antiblack bigotry or espouse antiblack racism may or may not suffer from self-hatred; for sure they're behaving not only unethically but stupidly. Ditto for anti-Semitic blacks. For both groups, racism is a threat to survival. *Richard D. Erlich*

CORRECTION

The editors regret that the fourteenth and fifteenth paragraphs of Francis Wheen's review of the Margaret Thatcher biographies ["'Her Malignancy,'" Nov. 7] were out of place. They ought to have followed the third paragraph.

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Cover drawing by John Alcorn

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Manuscripts: The magazine cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts unless accompanied by addressed, stamped envelopes.

Publisher, Arthur L. Carter

President and Associate Publisher, David Parker; *General Manager*, Neil Black; *Advertising Director*, Chris Calhoun; *Business Manager*, Ann B. Epstein; *Bookkeepers*, Tanveer Mall, Ivor A. Richardson; *Art/Production Manager*, Jane Sharples; *Circulation Director*, Margaret Pyle; *Subscription Manager*, Cookee V. Klein; *Publicity Director*, Sarah Perl; *InterNation Manager*, Phillip Frazer; *Director, Nation Books*, Elsa Dixler; *Assistant Advertising Manager*, Eamonn Fitzgerald; *Receptionist*, Greta Loell; *Mail Clerk*, John Holtz; *Administrative Secretary*, Shirley Sulat; *Production*, Terry Miller; *Typography*, Randall Cherry, Sandy McCroskey; *Nation Associates Director*, Sandra Zickefoose; *Syndication*, Jeff Sorensen; *Newsstand Sales Manager*, Jay Pearsall; *Special Projects Director*, Peter G. Meyer.

The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the first week in January, and biweekly in July and August) by The Nation Company, Inc. © 1988 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, Inc., 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011. (212) 242-8400. *Washington Bureau:* Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. International Telex: 667 155 NATION. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: *The Nation*, Box 1953, Marion, OH 43305. *Subscription Price*: One year, $36; two years, $64. Add $14 for surface mail postage outside U.S. Claims for missed issues must be made within 60 days (120 days foreign) of publication date. **Please allow 6-8 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions.** Back issues $3 prepaid ($4 foreign) from: *The Nation*, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011. *The Nation* is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Nation*, Box 1953, Marion, OH 43305. This issue went to press on November 17.

EDITORIALS.

Snuggle Time

Once again, we have entered that perfumed chamber where editorial writers and most other pundits passionately entwine with a new Administration on a heart-shaped bed. During this quadrennial embrace, recent history disappears—or, more accurately, is "disappeared." Gone are General Noriega, Willie Horton, Iran/*contra*. The Vice President, now President-elect, is suddenly a heroic "George Herbert Walker Bush" (*The Miami Herald*, *San Francisco Chronicle*), his victory "a triumph of tenacity" (*The New York Times*). He is "off to a good start" (*Los Angeles Times*) and, indeed, opined *The Atlanta Constitution*, "for a country anxious to creep into the future on little cat's feet, George Bush just might be the right man at the right time."

Such fog also swirled out of the editorial rooms of *The Washington Post*, though the paper preferred L. Frank Baum to Carl Sandburg for its literary frame. "Listening to George Bush's post-election press conference," the editorial began, "was a little like being back in Kansas after a trek

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through the more nightmarish precincts of Oz." Was the sleazy Bush campaign, then, just a dream? No, conceded *The Post*, but that's no reason to disparage his victory. And with that the smarmy G.O.P. tactics around the Pledge of Allegiance and the A.C.L.U. melted into the floor like the Wicked Witch of the West.

The cowardly lions of the media tripped all over their tails praising Bush's first Cabinet pick. James Addison Baker 3d is "admirably equipped to be secretary of state," *The Boston Globe* assured its readers. "The Baker appointment gets the Bush transition off to a solid . . . start," echoed Baltimore's *Sun*. He is "capable and moderate" (*The Miami Herald*), "a strong anchor" (*Los Angeles Times*), "no ideologue" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*), gives "evidence of a quick, sure start" (*The Washington Post*) and is "awfully smart—and congenial to boot" (*New York Newsday*).

James Baker is also, of course, the man who picked Dan Quayle as Bush's running mate and hired Roger Ailes to orchestrate the ticket's degrading McCarthyite campaign. He is a dutiful Reaganaut and a Trilateralist with impeccable establishment credentials (Princeton University, the Marine Corps). But most journalists are in no mood to burden a politics-weary public with suggestions that his gray managerial garb, and that of other incoming "pragmatists" on the Bush team, simply cloaks more of the same: a fine-tuning of bankrupt Republican policies at a time the country needs to muster new solutions for problems at home and abroad.

Instead of standing awestruck while Bush and his wizards manipulate the new Administration's sound and light show, the media should be tearing back the curtain, like Toto.

'Downsized'

What's still worth reading out there? Less and less, after the recent departure of two of the country's best daily newspaper editors. On November 4, Bill Kovach of *The Atlanta Constitution* and *Journal* quit under pressure from his publishers and the local corporate community. Ten days later, Katherine Fanning, editor of *The Christian Science Monitor* and the first woman president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, resigned along with two of her top editors. On the surface, the two cases are quite different. But together they epitomize much that is most depressing about the decline of serious journalism.

Kovach in a sense was fighting two battles. One was for a definition of the New South, as symbolized by the Atlanta boom. Was the press to stand idly by as old styles of Southern patronage slipped over easily into a new deference to big local money—such as the Coca-Cola Company, the Georgia Power Company and the Citizens and Southern National Bank, all of which were offended by Kovach's hard news reporting on a rapidly (and inequitably) changing city? At the same time, Kovach was fighting for a principle of serious journalism. His boss, the Cox newspaper group, held up a different model: *USA Today*, with its snazzy colors, two-paragraph stories and malnourishing McPaper politics.

Fanning, meanwhile, upheld an eighty-year-old Boston tradition and an anomaly in U.S. publishing—a not-for-profit newspaper. But her publishers, like Kovach's, now demand change. *The Monitor* is to be reduced in size by half, as is its editorial staff. The church's considerable resources are to be directed elsewhere—e.g., $20 million a year to the glitz of a TV news show, *World Monitor*.

Symptomatically, the business and editorial sides of *The Monitor* will now merge. Official explanations of the change are cluttered with the dreary new corporate media-speak: *The Monitor* will be "downsized," according to its new C.E.O., to make way for a "multimedia provider of news and information services." In Atlanta, the signs are equally ominous. Kovach bows out, and in comes Arnold Rosenfeld from *The Austin American-Statesman*, a dumb newspaper in a smart town, the kind of paper that keeps you guessing about what's going to be on the front page. Rosenfeld is a Cox company man from way back, with a local reputation as an inoffensive sort who specializes in thumb-twiddling columns about cute pets and local trivia but has no stomach for a fight with powerful interests—of which Cox and the Christian Science Church are clearly two.

'Waitniks'?

After years of demanding that the Soviet Union allow Jews and other citizens to emigrate, the United States may now be unable to let many of them in. Since 1985, Soviet emigration figures have risen significantly; this year, more than 13,000 Jews are expected to leave the Soviet Union—the highest level since 1980. But the relaxation of Soviet exit policies has created a backlog of emigrants and put U.S. officials in an embarrassing bind: They are faced with a legal acceptance ceiling of 24,500 for refugees from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in fiscal 1989.

Last July, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow was forced temporarily to stop issuing refugee visas to Soviet citizens, citing budgetary constraints. Although Reagan Administration officials take credit for the increase in Soviet emigration and downplay the potential crisis, a Washington representative of the American Jewish Committee put it more bluntly: "How ironic and tragic it would be if the United States created a new category of Soviet immigrant—the 'waitnik.'"

This development has gone largely unremarked in the U.S. media, which continues to focus on the shortcomings of *perestroika*. For example, during Andrei Sakharov's recent visit to this country the press played up his warnings that proposed constitutional and political changes in the Soviet system would violate the spirit of *perestroika*. For years, journalists have considered Sakharov the barometer of human rights in the Soviet Union. But as the emigration problem demonstrates, they now face the challenge of reporting a less dramatic and more nuanced picture.

Since January 1987, for example, more than 400 political prisoners have been released—the highest number since Nikita Khrushchev released thousands of them in the late

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1950s and early 1960s. Equally important, there has been a virtual moratorium on political arrests and trials, although short-term detention of demonstrators and other activists continues. And in the past year, a series of potentially significant reforms have been discussed openly in the Soviet press or placed on the legislative agenda, among them: dismantling the system of internal exile; redrafting the criminal code to repeal some of the laws used to imprison dissidents; providing detainees with pretrial access to lawyers; and eliminating capital punishment.

The creation last year of a Soviet human rights commission, which has held a series of unprecedented meetings with Western groups, including Helsinki Watch, was a sign that the Soviet government recognizes the legitimacy of Western human rights concerns. The similarities between the ideas of this official commission, headed by Fyodor Burlatsky, an adviser to Mikhail Gorbachev, and those of the unofficial Committee for Human Rights created in the early 1970s by Sakharov and other dissidents are striking.

There are other signs of the broadening discussion and the growing tolerance of unofficial sentiment. The views of former dissidents such as Larissa Bogoraz and historian Roy Medvedev, and émigrés such as Vladimir Voinovich and Lev Kopelev are being published in the official press. And "informal" groups, including the nationalistic Front groups in the Baltic republics, proliferate, suggesting the outlines of a civil society. While many of the more than 30,000 informal groups are concerned with culture, the environment and the preservation of historical monuments, many are also overtly political. A few years ago, such groups would have been suppressed by the K.G.B. and their members jailed. Now they are accepted, although some of their most prominent members have been harassed or attacked in the press.

These and other changes in the Soviet Union should force a rethinking of tired cold war assumptions and make it tougher for the Bush Administration—and the media—to use human rights rhetoric to fuel anti-Sovietism.

J.F.K.'s Legacy

Camelot had a short run. The political performance, rather than the musical play, was vastly more admired in retrospect than in full swing, and if it were not for the tragic curtain twenty-five years ago in Dallas, the memory of that brief period would doubtless have a different cast. The dreamy, Arcadian quality of the thousand days of John Kennedy is an attribute of national re-vision, a nostalgic remembrance of things past not necessarily as they were but as they came to be seen. Casals in the White House, Jackie in Paris, the Peace Corps and the bravado in Berlin: That is the stuff that filters through the scrim of history, and makes a myth that is now inextricable from the reality of the Kennedy time.

We are used to thinking of our past in neat terms of presidential administrations, an atavistic conceit, perhaps, derived from the tradition of naming historical periods after royal reigns. Certainly there was a Kennedy Era—even if there never was an Arthurian Age—but it was not entirely determined by executive decree or shaped by presidential model. John Kennedy was elected at a grand turning point in the history of the nation and a transformative moment in the development of its social culture. The imperial system was running at peak-performance levels. The national economy, which had soared on postwar domestic consumption, was poised to expand in the Third World and command a global market. The first postmodern generation was reaching puberty and already thinking thoughts and doing deeds that shocked its elders.

Kennedy stood astride those trends, alternately bucked and used them, and never achieved full mastery. A hard cold warrior from the start, he risked nuclear war more than once (the Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis) and never grasped the possibilities of Nikita Khrushchev's reforms, which prefigured Gorbachev's by a quarter-century. For most of his term he was an implacable enemy of the Cuban revolution and encouraged plots of assassination and subversion to reverse it. The noble ideas embodied in the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress were sacrificed to the *Realpolitik* of worldwide counterinsurgency warfare, and finally contradicted by the brutal and self-defeating devastation of Vietnam. Kennedy may have realized the folly of his project in his last hours (J.F.K. devotees grasp at the American University speech of June 10, 1963, as evidence of an anti-interventionist conversion), but he enters the history books as a warmonger not a peacemaker, and a counterrevolutionary not a liberator.

In the liberal Democratic tradition established by Roosevelt and Truman, Kennedy sought to extend welfare to needy groups not covered by the New and Fair Deals, particularly to the elderly and the poor, with Medicare and Medicaid passed shortly after his death. It is worth recalling that those worthy programs had the somewhat contradictory effect of pre-empting and thus removing the issue of comprehensive national health care (the frightening concept of socialized medicine, which Truman raised in 1948) from the national social agenda. Kennedy sent Federal marshals and Administration satraps to the South to protect black and white activists who had been laying their lives on the line for integration since the mid-1950s. But when Kennedy asked to speak at the March on Washington in 1963, the organizers refused, believing that the "white power structure" of national politics should remain the object of civil rights protest, not become a symbolic co-belligerent for the purposes of co-optation. August 28 became Martin Luther King Jr.'s day, not John F. Kennedy's.

What Kennedy did better than any President since Roosevelt, and what makes him a special kind of leader in American annals, was to mobilize a broad generational constituency—even if he was unable, by fate or his own limitations, to direct it to significant political change in his lifetime. There was no Kennedy Revolution. Kennedy's greatness now consists of some parts myth and sentiment, but his leadership went beyond mere celebrity and style, and it is doubtful that we will see such sparkle in the White House before the century ends.

ANDREW KOPKIND

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BEAT THE DEVIL.

After Algiers: The Peace Panic

From Algeria came reports of the Palestine National Council's rousing declarations; from Israel, news of Likud leader Yitzhak Shamir's dealings with the religious parties, of ministries maybe handed over to the Orthodox rabbis of Shas and Agudat Israel. Just as the exiled Palestinian leadership made a more decisive turn toward the politics of the possible, Israeli politicians embraced more tightly than ever the strategies, the religion, of extremism and intransigence.

A peace panic is gripping many U.S. supporters of Israel. Aghast on the morrow of the news from Algiers, they cried "nothing new" had happened. But there is something new, and they know it. The *intifada* has changed forever the political perspectives of Palestinians in the occupied territories and across the world. The timing could scarcely be more alarming for the Israeli lobby here: in Jerusalem, Orthodox rabbis pressing their agenda on civil society; in Algiers, the language of Palestinian statehood; in Washington, a prospective Administration headed by men—Bush, Baker, not to mention the probable chief of staff Sununu—regarded as of suspect constancy.

The reaction of the press to this momentous development has been predictable, and best represented by *The New York Times*'s editorial of November 16, which said that, rhetoric to the contrary, there was no fundamental change in Palestinian attitude that should be addressed by either Israel or the United States. Against which one should remember that for years both governments have challenged the P.L.O. to accept Resolutions 242 and 338; now that it has done so, the rules have promptly changed.

The words of former chief of Israeli intelligence Yehoshaphat Harkabi, in his forthcoming book *Israel's Fateful Hour*, are worth quoting at this point: "The merest hint that negotiations might be possible causes panic among Herut [the core of the Likud] and its allies." In Algiers the P.N.C. affirmed its recognition not only of 242 and 338 but also of the 1947 U.N. Resolution 181 establishing the partition of Palestine and therefore the birth of Israel. Now, Israel has never accepted the right of a Palestinian state to exist, as provided in 181, and has never been pressed by *The New York Times* to do so.

The November 16 editorial spoke of Palestinian rejectionism on the very day that Shamir reiterated for the hundredth time that Israel will never yield an inch of even the occupied territories. It spoke of Palestinian violence and extremism on the second day of a twenty-four-hour curfew in the territories, while thousands of Palestinians are interned without trial and thousands more have their stories of brutality and torture. Is there anything that any Palestinian could do to satiate the demands of Israel or the *New York Times* editorial board? The answer is no. Without a qualm *The Times* accepts implicitly the right of Israel to exert violence in its illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza but denies the Palestinians—indeed requires them formally to surrender—a principle recognized in international law and U.N. declarations: the right of any people to resist an occupier. This brings us back full circle to the essential question, the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, to which the declaration of sovereignty in Algiers has given refreshed vigor.

If the impending Administration is to make any effort to push the Israelis to the bargaining table, the role of the press in forming public opinion will be of enormous importance. This year virtually no one in the press challenged candidates toward a position on Israel's abuse of Palestinian rights and its barbarity in attempting to suppress the uprising. Yet on Election Day there were some interesting portents. In four communities across the country—in California, Berkeley and San Francisco; in Massachusetts, Newton and Cambridge—people had a chance to express themselves on the Palestinian issue. The voters of Berkeley were asked to urge their Mayor and City Council to adopt the Palestinian refugee camp and town of Jabalya in Gaza as a sister city, just as they had the township of Oukasie in South Africa, San Antonio in El Salvador and León in Nicaragua. The other voters were essentially asked to urge U.S. support of Palestinian statehood.

When the polls closed, the initiatives in Berkeley, San Francisco and Newton had failed by a margin of more than 2 to 1. But the reaction of the voters in Cambridge and certain portions of Somerville to Question 5 was very different, and surprising to everyone, including the Coalition for Palestinian Rights, which had mounted the campaign. The referendum called on the voters to urge their Congressman, Joe Kennedy, and the President to demand that Israel end "its violation of Palestinian human rights and its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza," stop "all expenditure of U.S. taxpayer's money for Israel's occupation" and favor the "establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with peace for all states in the region including Israel."

It was opposed by Massachusetts' two Senators, by Representatives Kennedy and Barney Frank and by candidate Michael Dukakis. The coalition's organizers had sparse funds but ran a grass-roots campaign with many student volunteers. They used to good effect the U.S. Catholic Bishops' message on the Middle East, held a debate at Harvard between Alan Dershowitz and Jim Zogby, and another encounter on television between Dershowitz and the coalition's Kathryn Silver. Organizers found the citizenry particularly responsive to the statement that taxpayer support of Israel's oppression of the Palestinians is wrong and should be stopped. At the end of the day 22,913 voters as against 20,113 had said yes to the question.

This was the first time in U.S. history that voters anywhere had spoken up so clearly for Palestinians—a significant piece of news, especially coming from a town with Cambridge's status on the politico-cultural map. But the vote has yet to be reported in *The New York Times* or on the networks. *The Boston Globe* mentioned the outcome in its

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Wednesday edition, and then quoted Philip Perlmutter, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council, who called the coalition's organizers "very radical and very pro-Arab." On Thursday *The Globe* said that the numbers were not yet in but that Question 5 had been defeated, and on Friday issued a small formal correction indicating passage of the measure "calling on the U.S. government to achieve peace in the Middle East." The *Boston Herald* on Thursday acknowledged the victory, then cited a committee chaired by Frank and Kennedy as saying that if taken with the Newton result, the negative vote in Cambridge showed a majority in the region opposed. Monday's *Globe* had a feature on the failed Newton campaign.

The Discourse of Fascism

Day by day the press shows evidence of willful or reflexive ignorance and racism in its coverage of Israel and the Palestinians. As I remarked a couple of weeks ago, no better testimony to this fact can be found than the writings of Thomas Friedman, until recently *The Times*'s correspondent in Israel. In *The New York Times Magazine* for October 30 Friedman unveiled what he billed as "radical new" proposals for peace, outlining what he called the "diplomatic" solution and the "tribal" solution. Actually these "solutions" mirror with considerable fidelity the respective plans of Labor and Likud.

"I learned everything I needed to know about how to make peace in the Middle East while grocery shopping in Jerusalem," Friedman begins. He then tells the story of the grocer Sasson who has a simple, brutal way of describing why any concession to the Palestinians "would eventually be used to destroy the Jewish state." "Everything Sasson had learned, smelled[!] and touched his whole life . . . everything life in Iraq and Israel had taught him" pointed to this fact. Friedman assumes this analysis as "the key to a Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement." Sasson, he says, "is not an extremist"—this because he doesn't appear to have any ideology. What's more, "there is a little bit of Sasson in every Israeli" (forgetting the Arab Israelis). "They don't hate the Arabs, but they don't have any affection for them, either. They are not violent by nature, but they will not hesitate to kill in order to defend their turf."

Friedman explains the comments of Sasson as visceral, primordial, tribal. This justification and forgiveness of racism is becoming surreal. A couple of weeks earlier in *The Times Magazine* Meron Benvenisti had described his son, a soldier, reporting how he and his fellows, belabored by insults and rocks from Palestinians, got mad and "broke their ribs." Then Benvenisti invoked "the primordial" and "atavistic," and pre-emptively denounced any attacks on his son's behavior from those comfortably lodged in their "ideological bunker." But at what point would Benvenisti say his son, even under "primordial" tensions, had done the wrong thing? Suppose he had buried those Arabs alive?

Friedman eliminates as wishful thinking any considerations of justice or rightness. A solution must appeal to Sasson, the useful idiot spouting the author's own notions. Efficacy from Sasson's standpoint is the only criterion. Similarly true to such logic is the total elimination of Palestinians as anything other than remote, disposable objects. In the entire course of his offered "solutions" no Palestinian is permitted identity or speech. They are "stone throwers and victims." A few months ago Friedman—having asserted that until he began sending his dispatches Israel was "the most fully reported country in the world but the least understood in the media"—told an Israeli interviewer, "As soon as Ahmed has a seat in the bus, he will limit his demands."

In *The Times* the Israeli invented by Friedman to speak for his "tribal" solution says of the autonomous zones vacated in the territories, "Once we pull out, the rules of the game would be, as they are in south Lebanon, Chicago Rules: They pull a knife, we'll pull a gun; they put one of ours in the hospital, we'll put 200 of theirs in the morgue." Two days after Herschel Grynszpan assassinated the Third Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris on November 7, 1938, the Nazis in revenge launched Kristallnacht. Has Friedman no sense of the reverberations of such "tribalist" talk about collective punishment, about putting 200 in the morgue in revenge for the wounding of one?

He seems not to. Whether in the language of tribalist or diplomat, Friedman's recommendations are reveries of fascism, plans executed unilaterally and determined solely on the basis of what's perceived as best for the Jewish state, for its national identity, for the well-being of its armed forces and security apparatus. Either way, the Palestinian entity is disarmed, encircled, abject—after which, Friedman generously concedes, "We are ready to enter into normal relations with whatever state you build," adding in the voice of the tribalist, "We are also ready to obliterate whatever state you build if you use it to threaten us in any way."

Friedman presents both the tribalist and the diplomat as alternatives to Israel's current leaders, whom he defines as "moderates with no guts, and heroes with lost causes." Shamir, the collaborator with Nazis, murderer of Bernadotte, is presumably the hero, lost in dreams of the past. Friedman's New Man would thus be heroically modern, perhaps the incarnation of writer Ze'ev Chafets's sick fantasy, quoted sympathetically by Friedman, about his son Shmulik, who is now growing up with a teddy bear but one day could drop a nuclear bomb on the Palestinians "without a second thought."

Thus one of the profession's most applauded reporters on Israel. Against this kind of intellectual and moral backdrop it really doesn't matter what the P.N.C. said in Algiers, because among such commentators in the United States Palestinians have no recognized reality as historical subjects with the right to intervene in their own destiny. This is the mindset that has to change if the political expression of public opinion in the United States is to transcend racism and complicity in oppression.

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BELTWAY BANDITS.

DAVID CORN AND JEFFERSON MORLEY

■ Less of the Same

The first Reaganism of the Bush era occurred approximately fifteen minutes into the President-elect's initial press conference. Noting that Bush had pledged to combat bigotry, a reporter asked for specifics on how he would make good on that promise. Did the fact that he had campaigned in mostly white, affluent areas, she asked, indicate that the country could expect four more years of Reaganesque civil rights policies? Bush never got around to providing details. Instead, he loyally defended Reagan's abysmal record and claimed, "When you look back at the history of the United States of America, I think [today] there are far fewer incidents that build on bigotry than there have been."

There is no factual basis for Bush's suggestion that racial incidents have declined during the Reagan years. The number of "bias incidents" recorded by the New York City Police Department went from 192 in 1981 to 463 in 1987, according to Capt. Maurice Collins, the executive officer of the bias incident investigative unit. And the Justice Department's community relations service reports that the number of racist episodes on college campuses increased from 170 in 1986 to 286 in 1988.

■ A Kinder, Gentler Health Policy

If George Bush really wants a kinder and gentler nation he should heed a report on Medicare and Medicaid put out by the House Select Committee on Aging, which documents the Reagan assault on those two health care programs. Between 1981 and 1987, Medicare funding was cut by $35.9 billion. But the "most telling part" of the Reagan legacy, the report says, "is seen in the percentage of America's poor covered by Medicaid as it dropped substantially from an already too low 53 percent in 1979 to closer to 40 percent currently." The Administration "should have been pushing for Medicaid coverage for 100 percent of poor people, not cutbacks in already woefully inadequate protection," says Representative Edward Roybal, who chairs the committee. Unfortunately, should Bush want to make health care a priority, it won't be easy. Any effort to bolster these two programs will be hindered by the remnants of a meaner era: the erosion of the tax base caused by the Reagan tax cuts, the huge commitment to military spending and the runaway increase of health care costs.

■ Be Kind to Your Banker

More likely to be a recipient of Bush's munificence than the elderly and the poor is the savings and loan industry. S&L executives have racked up at least $50 billion, and probably closer to $70 billion, in bad debts. The industry has denied for years that a bailout would be necessary. Now it is clear that the American taxpayer will have to foot the bill. That's where Bush's suddenly tender conscience comes in. A "gentler America" will be asked to pay for the mistakes of the speculator class. Congress will consider bailout legislation in the spring.

■ Glossary for the Bush Era

Reregulation: The savings and loan industry won't be the last to demand that the Federal government protect it from the rigors of the free market. Look for airlines and the trucking industry to follow suit.

Excesses: This hardy perennial in the apologist's vocabulary is sure to be heard as the bills for the Reagan era start coming due.

■ Baker and the Archbishop's Assassins

The fate of Alvaro Rafael Saravia, a Salvadoran implicated in the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980, will soon be in the hands of George Shultz and James Baker. Saravia, arrested in Miami last November, is appealing an extradition order. If Saravia loses in court, the Secretary of State will make the final decision on sending him back to El Salvador, where he might face trial for the murder.

Shultz, in consultation with his successor, is likely to approve Saravia's extradition. It would embarrass Roberto d'Aubuisson, for whom Saravia worked and who has also been linked to the assassination. A victory by d'Aubuisson's party, Arena, in the Salvadoran presidential election next March would imperil Congressional approval of aid to the Salvadoran regime. "Progress" in the Romero case will hurt d'Aubuisson and help win further aid on Capitol Hill.

D'Aubuisson has hired lawyers in El Salvador to assist Saravia. In the United States, Saravia's attorney is Neil Sonnet, the high-powered Miami lawyer who also represents Manuel Noriega. D'Aubuisson's trump card: He knows what U.S. officials knew of Salvadoran death squad operations in the early 1980s.

■ Is There a Doctor in the White House?

Before Dan Quayle could phone his dad with the good news, members of Congress had already drawn up the Presidential Health and Safety Act of 1989, which is expected to be the first bill in the hopper of the 101st Congress. Key provisions include:

§ establishing the Presidential Cholesterol Task Force, which would monitor the President's daily cholesterol level and set mandatory intake guidelines (the meat and dairy industries are expected to lobby against the measure);

§ grounding Air Force One and replacing it with an airbag-equipped Greyhound One;

§ enacting a flexible no-kids freeze—known as "the little brown one" amendment—that would allow the President to come into contact only with children who have already had measles, mumps and chicken pox;

§ relocating Camp David to the White House backyard;

§ removing all electrical appliances from each bathroom in the White House.

One controversial provision was dropped from the bill at the last minute. It would have prohibited the President from approaching within thirty-five feet of any tennis court unless he wears protective headgear.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Bourgeois in Bohemia

DANA GIOIA

THE LETTERS OF T.S. ELIOT, Volume I, 1898–1922. *Edited by Valerie Eliot. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 639 pp. $29.95.*

In June 1915, Thomas Stearns Eliot, a 26-year-old American graduate student on a traveling fellowship to Oxford, committed the one rash act of his life. He married Vivien Haigh-Wood, a vivacious young Englishwoman he had met only a few months before. Handsome, self-conscious and exaggeratedly decorous, Eliot entered marriage with little romantic and no sexual experience in his sheltered past. Since early childhood his life had been spent in one or another school, all of them elite—the Milton Academy, Harvard University, the Sorbonne, Oxford's Merton College. He had never had a job.

Neither set of parents knew of the marriage beforehand, and Eliot correctly guessed that his family would disapprove. His parents hoped he would begin a brilliant academic career the next fall at Harvard, a plan this hasty alliance could only upset. His father, Henry Ware Eliot, was a St. Louis brick manufacturer from a distinguished Massachusetts family and had patiently supported Tom's training to become a professor of philosophy. His mother, Charlotte Champe Eliot, was passionately attached to her youngest and brightest child. Haunted by her own frustrated literary ambitions, she desperately desired Tom to achieve the fame she "strove for and failed." Without warning their son had married an unknown foreigner, lost his fellowship, resigned from his Harvard assistantship, made plans to remain in wartime London and announced his scheme to support his wife and himself with unspecified literary work.

No wonder Eliot hesitated writing his father directly to discuss his plans. Instead, two days after the wedding he enlisted his new friend and fellow expatriate Ezra Pound to defend his decision to stay in England and pursue a literary career. Pound was delighted to oblige. From the moment Pound had read the manuscript of the unpublished "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" he had recognized Eliot's genius. It was, he wrote the editor of *Poetry*, "the best poem I have yet had or seen by an American." Yet the reserved Eliot had always kept him at a distance. Now, worried and confused, Eliot asked Pound for help in his intimate affairs.

Pound's long letter to the senior Eliot, a brilliant and quirky defense of expatriate literary life, remains an important document of international modernism, but it was not the epistle to soothe a worried father's nerves. Even on his best behavior, Pound could not talk about one expatriate poet for long without returning to himself. "As to T.S.E.'s work," he confided, "I think it is the most interesting stuff that has appeared since my own first book, five years ago." But after lecturing Eliot's father on assorted developments in modern American poetry—mostly initiated by Ezra Pound—he came down to practical terms. Mr. Eliot needed to support Tom for two years while his son built a literary reputation capable of sustaining a family.

Henry Ware Eliot was not convinced. Letters and cables crisscrossed the Atlantic. Finally, in late July, the dutiful son returned to face his family alone. (The nervous Vivien had refused to sail with him partly from fear of German U-boats.) This short visit proved uncomfortable for everyone. His mother was overcome with anxiety. His father questioned his son's judgment. Eliot wavered between resuming his Harvard studies and remaining in London. In either case he promised his parents he would finish his dissertation. Satisfied that Tom would not throw away his academic career, his father generously offered to continue his allowance. Suddenly news came from England that Vivien was ill, and Eliot hurried back. Leaving his family's summer home in East Gloucester, Massachusetts, the poet had no idea how decisive his return voyage would prove. He would never see his father again, never resettle in America, never become a university professor, and, by his own reckoning, not for the next forty years be genuinely happy.

Back in England Eliot's romantic and literary dreams quickly faded before the difficulty of his situation. Each time Vivien recovered from one illness she soon collapsed into another. A family visit could leave her prostrate for days with nervous anxiety. Desperate to become the good provider his own father had always been, Eliot took a series of temporary teaching jobs, but they proved inadequate to support even his frugal household, especially as living costs rose with the war. "I must do everything I can to earn more money," he wrote his former teacher Bertrand Russell. He began reviewing both to supplement his income and to gain notoriety for the permanent literary job he hoped to acquire. But gradually this responsible and realistic young poet recognized the ugly truth. His bride was a chronic invalid utterly dependent on him. Literary work was ill paying and irregular. His teaching and domestic duties left him too exhausted to write poetry. While a small circle of literary acquaintances now acknowledged his poetic talent, his growing reputation did little to alleviate the burdensome problems of his daily life.

Bohemia offered the once securely middle-class young poet no escape from this "most awful nightmare of anxiety the mind of man could conceive." Money worries continued. Poetry ceased to come. Vivien's illnesses proliferated until Eliot's letters home sounded like catalogues of pathology. Each time her name is mentioned one learns to expect some gruesome new malady—colitis, neuritis, catarrh, gastric influenza, neuralgia, hemicranial migraines, rheumatism, defective secretion of the glands. What he did not confide in his letters was her increasingly destructive addiction to the sedatives and painkillers her doctors so liberally prescribed. The long, futile nights of nursing Vivien in their squalid apartment taught Eliot the completeness of his failure as a husband. For all his love and idealism he could bring her neither health nor security. He became obsessed with fears of his own death and her destitution. Finally, in March 1917, the 28-year-old Eliot astounded his wife, family and friends by taking a full-time job in the Colonial and Foreign Department of Lloyd's Bank. "You will be surprised to hear of me in this capacity," he wrote his mother, "but I enjoy it."

This absorbing personal drama forms the human setting of the long-awaited first volume of *The Letters of T.S. Eliot.*

Dana Gioia writes frequently on poetry for The Hudson Review *and elsewhere. A book of his poems,* Daily Horoscope, *was published by Graywolf Press.*

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Although this hefty and thoroughly annotated collection officially spans twenty-five years of Eliot's life (from ages 9 through 34), its actual focus is much narrower. Nearly 600 pages of the 639-page tome chronicle a crucial eight-year period of Eliot's personal and public development. This period begins in August 1914, when the young poet unexpectedly arrived in London (fleeing from the University of Marburg at the outbreak of World War I), and runs through the end of 1922, when Eliot achieved sudden fame with the simultaneous publication of *The Waste Land* in both England and America and the commencement of his influential critical quarterly *The Criterion*. The record this volume provides is impressive in both quantity and quality. It gives weekly and sometimes daily accounts of the personal, literary and business affairs of this complex and secretive writer.

No profession enjoys malicious gossip more than that of literary academics, and some early reviewers of this volume have already expressed much high-minded exasperation that the Eliot letters do not contain more graphic confessions of the poet's private life. One senses the guardians of literary culture are disappointed to read a book this long that does not contain lurid revelations of Eliot's sexual activities. The shit-stained knickers and florid hard-ons that make James Joyce's correspondence a monument of *Weltliteratur* are conspicuously absent here. Instead one only finds the apparently boring spectacle of a brilliant and introspective young man candidly discussing the major problems of his life.

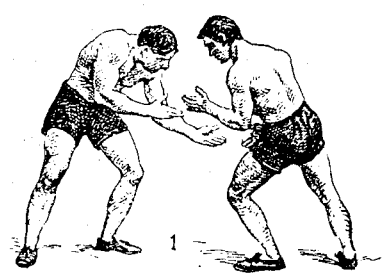
"Letters should be indiscretions—otherwise they are simply official bulletins," Eliot wrote his fellow poet Conrad Aiken. While this volume contains a few too many official bulletins—letters of mainly documentary interest, which chronicle social engagements, lectures, trips, etc.—the overwhelming bulk of them are frank and personal accounts of his often troubled existence. If he is sometimes reticent about the details, he usually speaks directly about the problems he faced, and he always writes intelligently and well. The volume's real surprise is that Eliot's letters are so consistently personal. The laconic public man of later years is not yet in evidence. While he frequently discusses literature and ideas, his primary topic is his own difficult domestic and professional life.

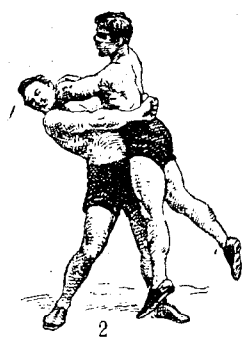
If there is a problem with this volume, it is one of editorial permissiveness. During his lifetime Eliot did his best to suppress biographical information. An intensely private and rigidly proper man, he was deeply ashamed of his failed first marriage and Vivien's eventual confinement in an insane asylum. He expressly forbade that any biography be written of him. He also destroyed many family and personal letters. His secrecy, of course, only fueled speculation about what he was trying to hide. Pseudo-scholarly guesswork has gone to absurd lengths, especially lately, for instance, when one critic maintained without any documentary evidence that Eliot had a youthful homosexual affair with Jean Verdenal, a French medical student later killed in World War I, whom the poet met while studying in Paris.

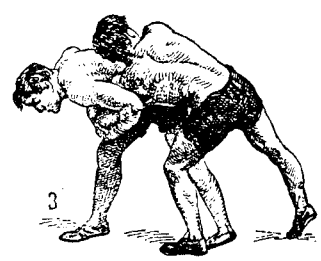
Confronting such assertions, Eliot's second wife and widow, Valerie, obviously edited the volume to set the record straight—at least as she sees it. Consequently, in addition to the poet's own letters, she intermittently includes various correspondence from family, friends, teachers and associates. These secondary contributors include Eliot's father, mother and first wife, as well as Ezra Pound, Bertrand Russell, André Gide, Richard Aldington and, inevitably, Jean

THE MEN FROM THE BOYS

Rites of Passage in Male America







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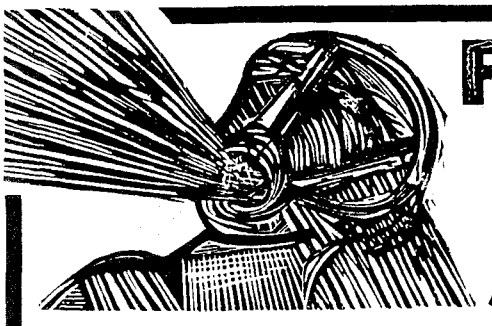
Verdenal (who emerges as a bright, conventional and heterosexual bourgeois who always addresses Eliot with the formal "Vous"). The letters from Vivien prove invaluable. Her nervous, intelligent but disjointed correspondence provides a vivid portrait of the woman who, sick or well, dominated the poet's existence for nearly twenty years. Her letters also frequently amplify personal and social circumstances Eliot only partially describes. Letters like those of Verdenal, however, belong in a scholarly journal. Their inclusion sometimes brings the volume too close to a documentary history full of interesting but inconsequential information.

But Eliot's own letters transcend their documentary surroundings. Read together, his early correspondence comprises a powerful and unified narrative that reveals the unknown Eliot, a vulnerable and obscure young poet that the dignified and internationally famous elder writer wished forgotten. On a human level the story the letters tell may seem almost prosaic, but being genuine it soon proves emotionally compelling. It is the commonplace tale of a sensitive youth unprepared for the bitter difficulties of adulthood. As the story progresses, however, Eliot proves no ordinary protagonist. Disastrously married, accidentally expatriated, emotionally dependent on his distant family, habitually short of cash and hopelessly drunk on the unprofitable art of poetry, Eliot consciously trades freedom for survival, then happiness for success. These hard-driven bargains were not so much Faustian as commercial. Like the prudent banker he became, Eliot gradually learned the necessity of repressing the open, emotional side of his nature in favor of the rational and deliberate. The extraordinary drama of these letters comes from watching Eliot transform himself into a consummate emotional realist and politic public man of letters while somehow still protecting the poet inside. The metamorphosis cost him a nervous breakdown and much of his humanity. It also made him the most influential English-language poet and critic of the century.

The public Eliot who emerges at the end of these letters is a survivor—wise but disillusioned, socially astute but cold, stiffly middle-aged at 34. He saw literary life as petty and sordid. "Poetry is a mug's game," he once remarked in the British English he gradually adopted (a mug being a dupe). By 1922 Eliot had resolved to be a mug no longer. He negotiated lucrative deals for his books and plays. He grew modestly wealthy by giving readings and lectures. And he advised every youth who would listen to avoid poetry as a career. He knew too well its emotional cost. The Greek Nobel Prize laureate George Seferis recounted that when Eliot heard about a young man who wanted to dedicate himself to poetry he remarked with unenviable authority, "He's getting for a sad life."

If Eliot had a sad life, he was unwittingly much to blame. Like all of the major first-generation modernist American poets, Eliot was the product of the educated upper-middle class. In a town only a few decades removed from the frontier, his father was unusual not only for his prosperity but also his college education. Much of the difficulty Eliot faced in early adulthood came from his inability to distance himself from his parents' bourgeois Republican values. Although Eliot wanted to become a poet, he never expected to give up his comfortable standard of living. While Pound contentedly accepted an existence at subsistence level, hardly worrying about next month's rent or this week's groceries, Eliot could not



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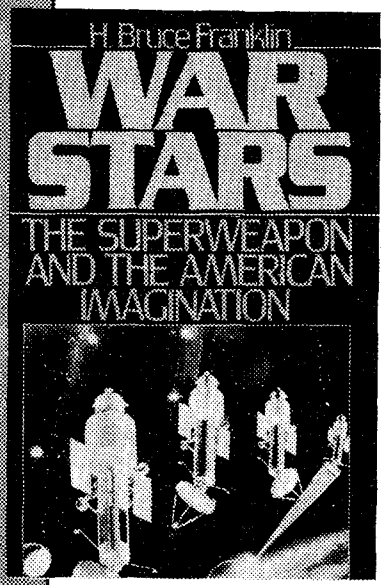

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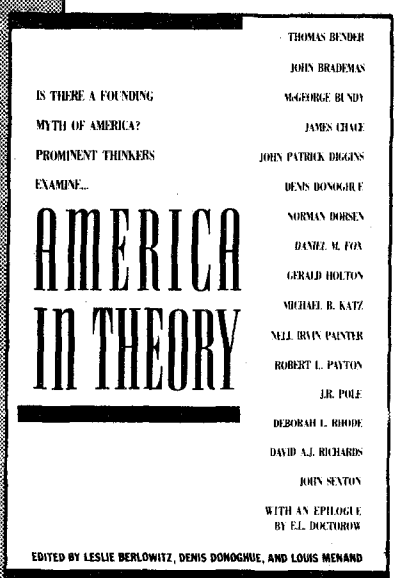

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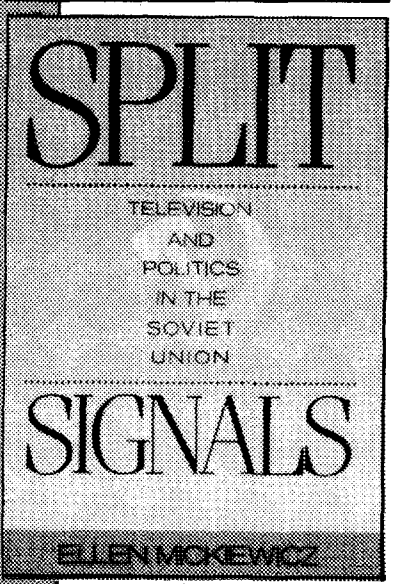

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bear even the possibility of economic uncertainty. What Pound saw as *la vie bohème* Eliot viewed as squalid poverty. In his 20s he already worried over life insurance and retirement savings. He frequently asked his family for money—not just to cover current expenses but also to put into a savings account for possible emergencies. More than once he complained to his mother that his funds were so low he might have to let Vivien's charwoman go. No wonder Mrs. Eliot fretted so much when her pampered youngest son decided to become a freelance writer in London. "Tom has always had every reasonable desire gratified," she told Bertrand Russell, "without any thought of ways and means, up to the present time." His stay in literary bohemia lasted only eighteen nerve-racking months before he escaped to Lloyd's. Starting over in banking actually reduced Eliot's income, but the job offered promotions and security. Pound objected. Eliot's wife shed tears. But the poet knew what he needed. He no longer had to depend on writing for money. He had regained his middle-class self-respect. "It is a relief to be no longer on the hunt and a nuisance to everyone I know," he wrote on starting the job.

Yet if Eliot's middle-class expectations contributed to his problems, that same set of values also helped him succeed. While his career may not prove Edison's maxim that "genius is 1 per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration," his example certainly does not contradict it. Once he joined Lloyd's Bank, Eliot settled down to a bone-crushing schedule of fourteen- or fifteen-hour days from which he never relaxed until forced to in old age by emphysema. He rose early in the morning to write for two hours before going to the office. He then worked at the bank from 9:15 A.M. to 5:30 P.M., six days a week, translating correspondence and analyzing the balance sheets of foreign banks. Returning home, he spent the evening on writing and editorial projects in addition to nursing his wife. He was driven as much by shame as ambition. Having faltered once as a literary freelancer, knowing his family thought his marriage a fiasco, bearing the disapproval of his literary friends for entering business, Eliot was determined never to fail again. He would succeed at both careers, and to everyone's surprise he did. He was quickly promoted at the bank then promoted twice again, and he kept on writing—at an incredible rate.

"There are only two ways in which a

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writer can become important," the banker Eliot confided to an old Harvard professor. "To write a great deal, and have his writing appear everywhere, or to write very little. . . . I write very little." The numerical facts, however, dispute Eliot's modest self-assessment. During the nine years he spent at Lloyd's (1917 through 1925) Eliot changed the course of modern poetry and criticism. He published more than 130 essays, articles and reviews, including "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "The Metaphysical Poets" and "The Function of Criticism." He began his influential reassessment of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. He wrote about a third of his mature poetry, most notably *The Waste Land*, "Gerontion," "The Hollow Men" and most of "Sweeney Agonistes." He composed or collected eight books and pamphlets. He taught evening courses in literature. He became assistant editor of *The Egoist*, the London correspondent for *The Dial*, and in 1922 started *The Criterion*, of which he was the sole editor.

The pressure of this workload strained his health and eventually led him to a nervous breakdown in late 1921 (the exact medical nature of which the *Letters* does little to clarify), but even his recuperation in a Lausanne sanitorium proved a working vacation. The convalescent Eliot used the time to finish *The Waste Land*. His daily schedule both compensated for his painful marriage and made it worse. His personal life gradually shrank to a laborious routine. But his effort made him the most famous modernist poet in English. He realized the exchange he had made but never regretted it. Raised in the professional class, he knew that success always comes at a price.

Studying Eliot's life, one ponders that price carefully. Except for his brief breakdown and Vivien's slow decline, Eliot's biography lacks the tangible tragedy of the archetypal doomed poet. He did not pay for his genius with madness like H.D. or suicide like Crane or treason like Pound. Instead, in private, he made the quiet everyday sacrifices of personal freedom, sexual love and domestic happiness. He protected the tender side of his humanity by learning to repress it so that the pain was invisible to the outside. That rarely successful creature, a bourgeois artist, Eliot refused to put his craft above his values. He rejected the idealistic egotism that George Bernard Shaw once characterized by saying, "The true artist will let his wife starve, his children go barefoot, his mother drudge for his living at seven-

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ty, sooner than work at anything but his art." Eliot—like his Harvard contemporary Wallace Stevens—was determined to lead a responsible life. Neither would abandon his middle-class morality for art. But the Muse demanded sacrifice, and they offered their youth, their marriages, their friendships, even, all evidence suggests, their sexuality. No Americans ever wrote greater poems. Was it a fair exchange? The question can't be answered, but it remains worth asking. □

Shawing Off

ELINOR LANGER

BERNARD SHAW, Volume I, 1856–1898: The Search for Love. *By Michael Holroyd. Random House. 486 pp. $24.95.*

In his preface to *Misalliance*, George Bernard Shaw remarked that "a mother is like a broomstick or like the sun in the heavens, it does not matter which as far as one's knowledge of her is concerned: the broomstick is there and the sun is there; and whether the child is beaten by it or warmed and enlightened by it, it accepts it as a fact in nature, and does not conceive of it as having had youth, passions, and weaknesses, or as still growing, yearning, suffering, and learning." It was the kind of strong, apparently disinterested, statement he was fond of making about many things, even death: "It is a fact like the rising of the sun and has simply to be faced, not argued about," he said. Shaw himself, who lived from 1856 to 1950, is also simply a fact. In a literary life unrivaled in either of his centuries, he wrote, in addition to the criticism and lectures with which he began, a number of novels, fifty-five plays, a half-dozen works on politics and economics, hundreds of occasional pieces including prefaces to many of the plays and thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of letters, which constitute an epic of their own. His merest postcard contained something worth treasuring and was often preserved. The word "Shavian," now a dictionary entry, was first used as early as 1907. He was awarded a Nobel Prize in 1925. Surrounding himself with words with which he eventually surrounded everyone else as well, he became a kind of natural phenomenon at which the rest of the world could only gape in wonder. The question—what Shaw himself would probably have called "the great question"—that has remained unanswered until now, is, How?

Anyone who has ever tried to penetrate Shaw's own accounts of things to the man himself can only greet Michael Holroyd's new biography with relief. To continue for a moment with the words quoted above: Who would guess, for example, that Shaw's own mother was so much more the broomstick than the sun that it not only mattered, it shaped her son's life, her yearnings very much to the point; or that, quailing before surgery, like any mortal, he used fear of sickness and death to allow himself, at 42, to marry at last the woman, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, with whom he would live the rest of his life? Even Shaw's least obviously autobiographical writings contain much autobiography which, as writers beginning with Eric Bentley have pointed out, accounts for their hidden emotional force, but usually in such an inverted form that it is practically encrypted. Nor are the biographies much help, for many of them were written under his influence, by friends and admirers, and are themselves Victorian, and the others are too limited by their scholarly intentions to even attempt to be definitive.

The independent Holroyd, as the Shaw estate happily perceived, was exactly the man for the job. Having survived biographies of Hugh Kingsmill, Augustus John and, most importantly, Lytton Strachey with enough ambition to face the still more prodigious, more eccentric Shaw, he accepted the commission—with the proviso that the worst the estate could do was withdraw its approval, not the book—and has been working for fifteen years. The very title of his first volume, *Bernard Shaw: The Search for Love*, tells how well he has succeeded. For with that one phrase he has lifted Shaw out of the realm of the mythic, where he labored so mightily to place himself, and has rendered him, forever, human.

The core of Holroyd's idea is that Shaw took the disappointments of what he once, honestly, described to actress Ellen Terry as a "devil of a childhood . . . rich only in dreams, frightful and loveless in realities," and, unable to look at them directly, converted them into a paradoxical "criticism of life" by which "he turned lack of love inside out and, by attracting from the world some of the attention he had been denied by his mother, conjured optimism out of deprivation." It was certainly a loveless childhood. Son of a father indifferent to everything but drink and a mother indifferent to everyone except a mesmeric voice teacher named George Vandeleur Lee, whom everyone but Shaw suspected of his paternity, he was miserable at home, miserable at school, miserable as a clerk, miserable everywhere until, in 1876, having followed his mother and Lee from Dublin to London, where they were maintaining a supposedly chaste liaison, he forswore other employment and sat down to begin writing the novels in which he alone believed.

A key event in the evolution of the invincible "G.B.S." from the vulnerable characters successively identified by Holroyd as "Sonny," "George" and merely "Shaw" was, oddly enough, a battle with smallpox in 1881, from which he emerged sufficiently disfigured, in his own view, to grow a beard. Photographs document a striking transformation from the youth of his early 20s with his conventional dress, slicked-down hair and what he himself delicately described as the "tenderest sprouting" on his chin to the intentionally contrived Mephistopheles of his 30s, with his high-collared Jaeger suit, his hair swept upward around his forehead at an angle echoed by brows and mustache, and a great beard so red, bright and bushy it was enough to give anyone courage. It was about this time, in another act of self-definition, that he became a vegetarian.

That by the middle 1880s he had a good socialist face is not exactly inapropos. After circulating through numerous groups ranging from H.M. Hyndman's Marxist Social Democratic Federation to William Morris's anarchist Socialist League, he found his way to the gradualist but persistent Fabians and became not only one of their leading thinkers but their leading talker as well, making no less than sixty-six speeches in 1887 alone and nearly a thousand over the next decade. It was from his politics, too, as much as from the circles associated with his paying work as an art, music and literary critic for various London papers, that he drew many of his friends: men such as Sidney Webb, with whom he had a close, lifelong collaboration;

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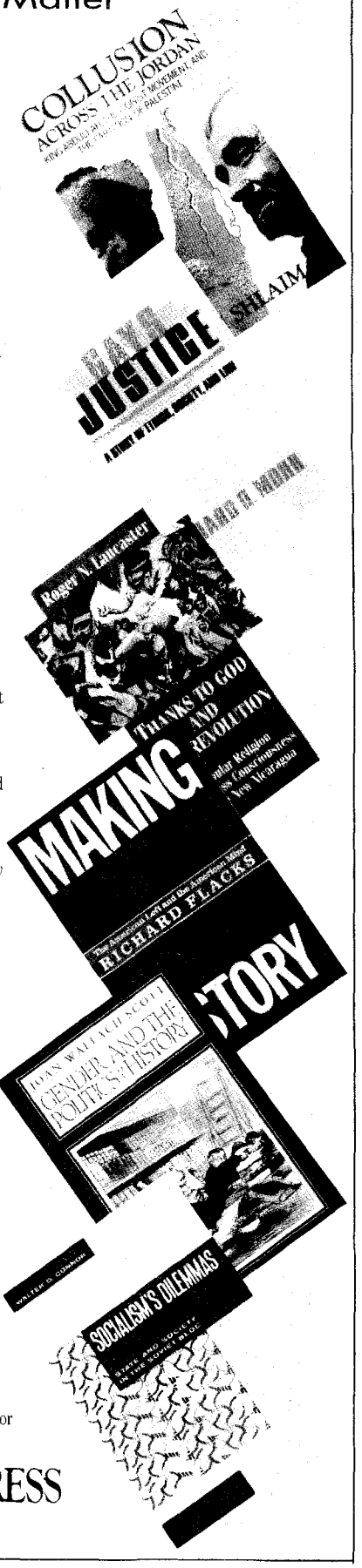

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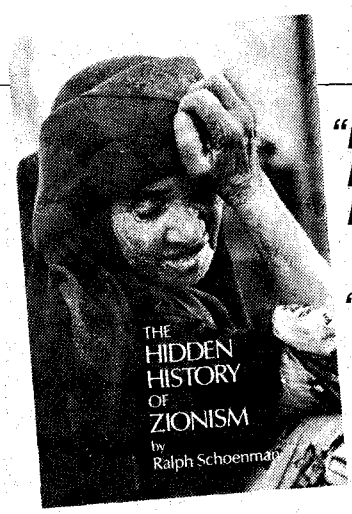
women such as May Morris (daughter of William) and Annie Besant; and—of great importance to the Holroyd thesis—couples such as Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling and Hubert and Edith Bland with whom he played a seductive but technically innocent "Sunday husband" kind of role which enabled him to re-enact the ambiguous triangle of "George," his mother and George Vandeleur Lee.

Actual sex was something else. Though he surrendered his virginity at 29 to a friend of his mother fifteen years his senior—further supporting the Holroyd view that he was driven to attempt to suppress and indulge his incestuous feelings simultaneously—only one other sexual relationship, with the actress Florence Farr, seems to have carried much weight, and among the things they shared was the conviction that the "ungraceful antics" of physical love need not be taken too seriously. "If you have any doubts as to my normal virility, dismiss them from your mind," Shaw told Frank Harris. "I was not impotent; I was not sterile; I was not homosexual; and I was extremely susceptible." Holroyd agrees. But since there was no way that another woman could provide him with everything he had longed for from his mother, he diverted his passion to literature. "Sexual excitement produced in him an ejaculation of words" from which letters, novels, plays and everything else followed. His relationships with actresses, which multiplied with his increasing involvement with the stage—Farr, Janet Achurch and particularly Ellen Terry, whom he never even met—provoked a kind of sublime frustration out of which he conceived "the make-believe of his plays." Holroyd is not inventing this. Confronting his need for Charlotte—with whom, contrary to dogma, he did indeed have a sexual relationship—Shaw himself told her that "he felt robbed of 'that most blessed of things—unsatisfied desire'" and complained "I have squandered on you all the material out of which my illusions are made."

Illusionless or not, Shaw recognized in Charlotte the one woman he had ever met whose need for independence was as great as his own, a thing in itself, not a means to something else, and evidently he felt secure. Their marriage—"Shaw: Do you understand that this means our living together in the eyes of the world? Charlotte: Of course I do: it can't be helped"—was preceded by considerable financial as well as emotional negotiation, and made possible only by the success of *The Devil's Disciple* in America, which gave Shaw his first income as a dramatist. Although by then he had written six other plays, including *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Candida* and *Arms and the Man*, none had produced any following and he was anxious lest Charlotte's wealth, contrasted with his meager earnings as a journalist, make him appear a fortune-hunter. It is there, in 1898, wife and money in hand—and departing his mother's rooms at last—that Holroyd, essentially, leaves him. The next volume, said to be already at the publisher, is enticingly titled *The Pursuit of Power*.

It is one of the conventions of reviews of biography that they focus on the subject, inadequately and often inaccurately summarizing facts and patterns it has taken the author years to establish, and leave the art of the biographer more or less unexamined. In the case of an achievement as substantial as Holroyd's, this would be a particular disservice. Every



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biography is, to one degree or another, an epistemological quagmire. There is not only the problem of collecting the myriad notes, letters, journals, articles, books, whatever, written by the subject, but the problem of determining what they mean. Not only letters, but even diaries, often lie. The biographer confronts the difficulty of reading everything the subject ever wrote and comparing it with everything else he or she can garner on the same matters to see how close to or far the subject is from the mark. In the case of Shaw, this task could easily be overwhelming because of the volume and cleverness of the words. Holroyd gives every sign of having enjoyed the company. He writes in an ever so slightly Shavian style which blends beautifully with Shaw's and enables him to start or complete Shaw's sentences or thoughts, or criticize them, as needed. Watch who is speaking, for example, in these lines from early in the book:

> He [Shaw] writes of a strangeness "which made me all my life a sojourner on this planet rather than a native of it. Whether it be that I was born mad or a little too sane, my kingdom was not of this world; I was at home only in the realm of my imagination, and at my ease only with the mighty dead." It is this voice from the living dead that, despite the marvellous Shavian cadence, chilled his audience. In the lost childhood of Sonny the philosophy of G.B.S. was conceived. "What else can I do?" he had asked. He strove to bring the world into harmony with his lonely nature, but the world reacted subconsciously to what was suppressed rather than to what he proclaimed.

Here the biographer is a kind of omniscient narrator, dipping into and pulling out of the subject's consciousness at will.

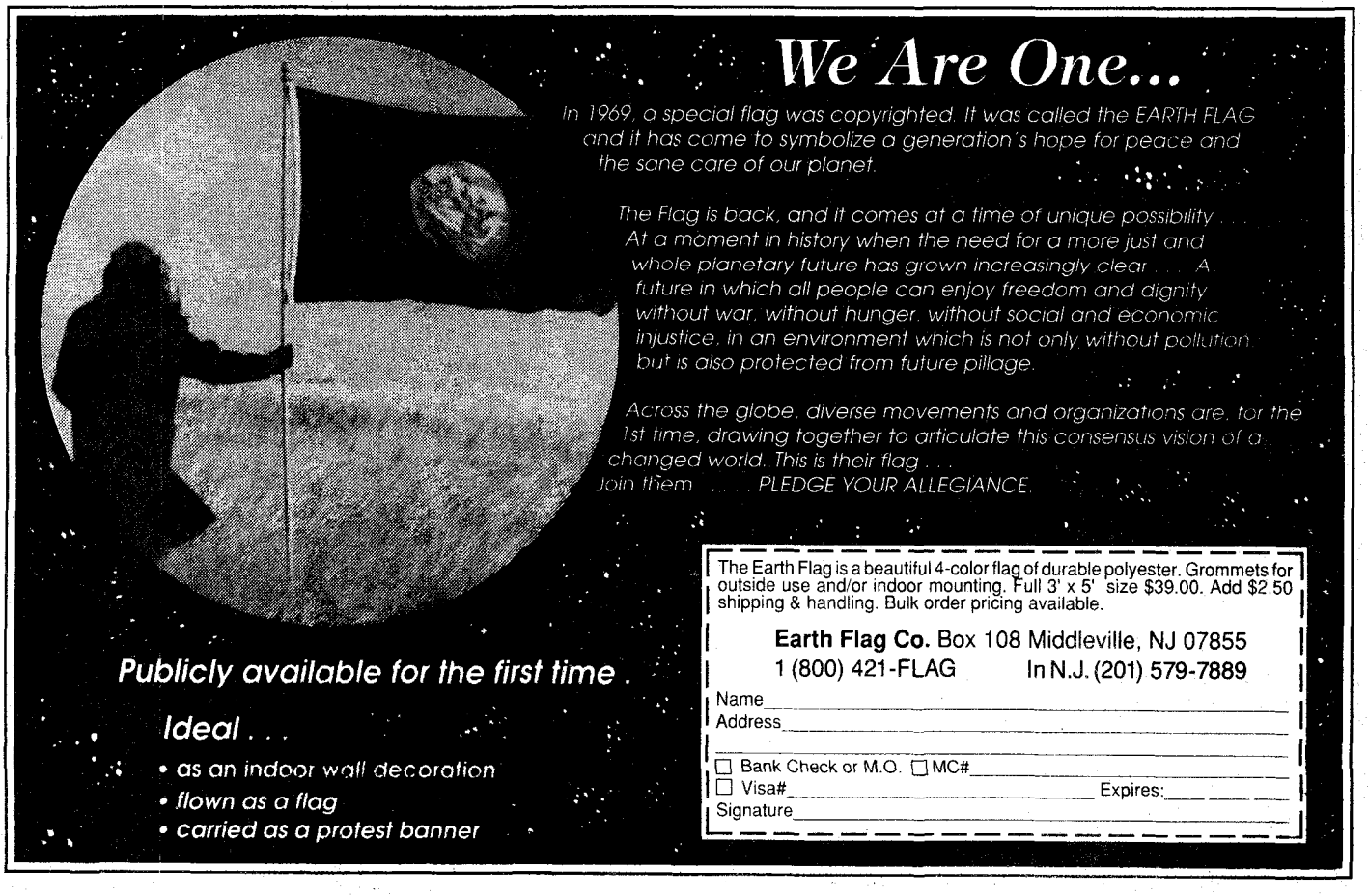
The same method is used in other ways to introduce an independent point of view while still allowing the subject and others to speak for themselves, as where Holroyd juxtaposes Shaw's version of a letter he received from a woman to whom he had been attached announcing her engagement to someone else—"she 'sent me a note to say what she was going to do, adding, by way of apology for throwing me over, that she could never marry a man she loved'"—with the letter he actually got—"Long ago I saw that my love for you was a waste of force . . . but it is only lately I have been able to love anyone else"—thereby turning Shaw's account into a revelation. Another illustration is what becomes almost a dialogue between the biographer and Shaw's friend, the critic William Archer, on Shaw's levity, which Archer believed limited his appeal:

> He saw through Shaw's optimism; he did not see Shaw's need for optimism. It was the urgency of this need that was driving Shaw to hammer together, like a magical raft, his synthetic philosophy and float lightly upon it over the sea around him. Archer wanted him to abandon this whimsical craft and plunge into the water. But that ran against Shaw's instinct; he could not do it—if he tried he would drown.

A passage which respectfully preserves and challenges Archer's understanding at the same time.

Complexity of voice is not the only biographical problem Holroyd handles with distinction. Another is the problem of foreground and background. How much has to be explained about the nature of music, for example, to make clear its attraction to Shaw from his earliest boyhood?

> In music Sonny's senses came alive, and he found the living presence of those feelings that literature described. Romance flourished without ridicule in the world of music—he felt he was experiencing all manner of impossible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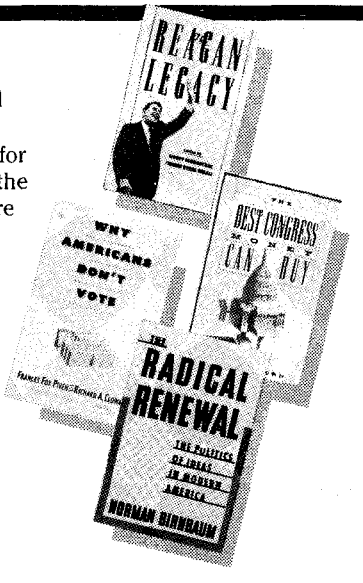

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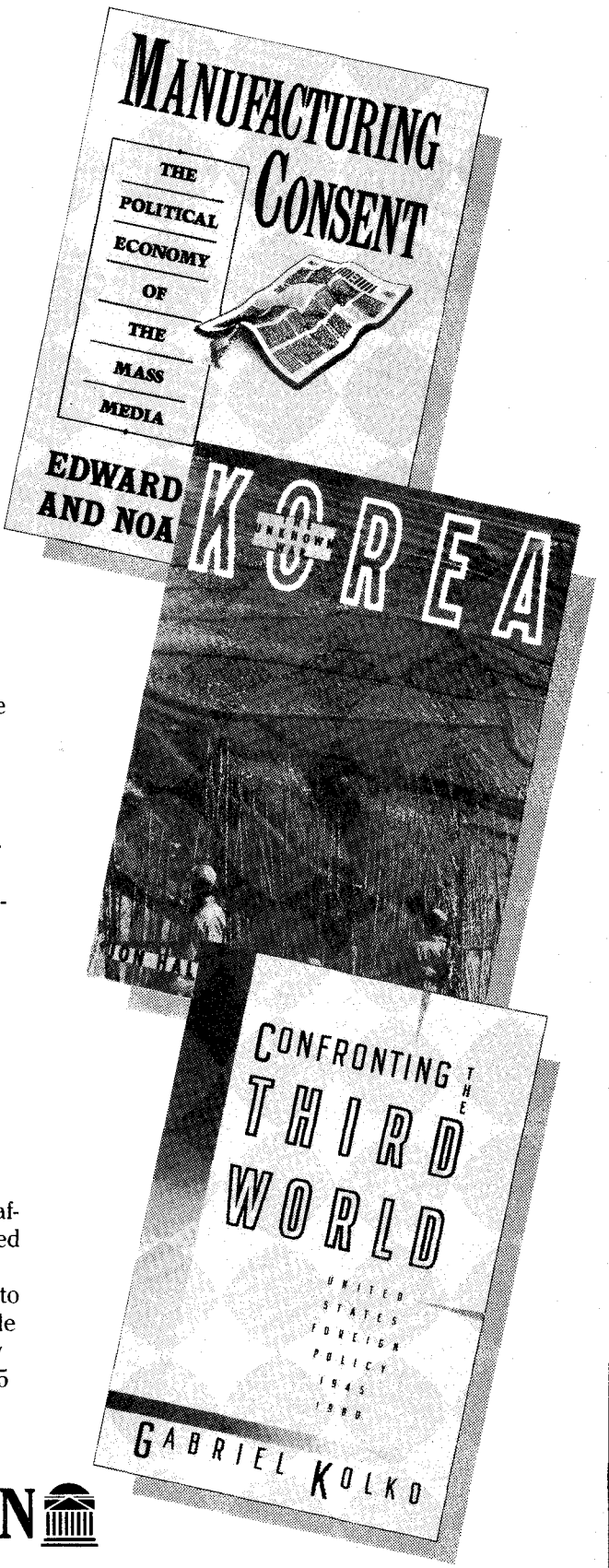

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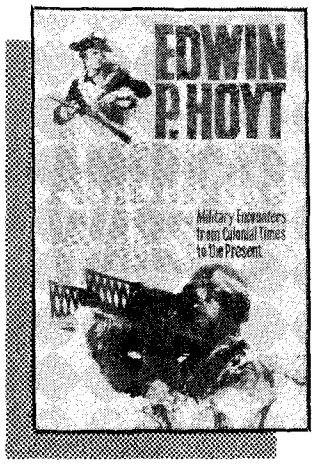

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emotions: the "candour and gallant impulse of the hero, the grace and trouble of the heroine, and the extracted quintessence of their love."

How do you capture freshly the void felt by nineteenth-century Englanders including Shaw, who, following the advance of Darwinism, were "left with the habit of belief without its substance"?

> The London in which Shaw had been living was like a City of Revelation. Among the philosophical ruins wandered pedants and prophets offering miracles that were shortly to come to pass. From agnostics, anarchists and atheists; dress- and diet-reformers; from economists, feminists, philanthropists, rationalists, spiritualists, all striving to destroy or replace Christianity, was the socialist revival of the late nineteenth century to be drawn.

Still another biographical problem is the treatment of minor characters. Are they to be given only in relation to the biographical subject or with all the importance they had to the world? Here too Holroyd often manages a perfect balance. No one reading his account of the strange relationship between Shaw, the actress Ellen Terry and the actor Henry Irving, could ever again either confuse Terry with one of Shaw's many other actresses, say, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, or fail to give the great Shakespearean actor his due. No one who reads here Shaw's moving letter to Sidney Webb, written when Shaw was 90—"if anyone had asked me what I owed to you I should have said my entire education. The truth is that we complemented one another. . . . I can also say that I never met a man who combined your extraordinary ability with your unique simplicity and integrity of character. . . . When we met, you knew everything that I didn't know and I knew everything that you didn't know. We had everything to learn from one another and brains enough to do it"—will ever again be certain which was the greater, which the lesser, light.

Here and there one can find imperfections. The sense of time rushing forward that is often present in biographies is somewhat lacking in this one, no doubt because, given the scale Holroyd has chosen, it is not really rushing. Considering the combination of Shaw's longevity and his industry it may have been impossible for it to be otherwise, but the result is a kind of density which is at times chronologically confusing. Occasionally the prose overreaches and the

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strain of composition is obvious, and more occasionally still, something is not transparent, as is the case, for example, with his discussion of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Although here too the problem is as much Shaw as Holroyd, the obscurity is unfortunate because it was a work of such importance to the theater of both Shaw and Ibsen. Then there is the matter of notes, for which he has already been criticized by several reviewers. Holroyd's decision not to supply them with the biography itself but to provide full treatment separately later is understandable because of the burden of scholarship involved, but it is disappointing. When a biographer moves back and forth as freely as he does, so often using Shaw's later commentaries to illuminate his earlier life, it is especially desirable for the reader to be able to know exactly who said what when. His dismissal of the notes issue as of concern only to specialists is somewhat patronizing. All these fine points, however, merely prove that a biography is a book written by one human being about another, neither of them flawless; anyone who let such details interfere in the slightest degree with the sheer joy of reading a work in which everything major is handled superbly would be making a mistake.

It is important to remember that Shaw's "search for love" was conducted, for the most part, in high spirits. He turned everything that happened to him into entertainment. Reacting to the returns of his earliest novel manuscripts by publishers, he parodied, "I feel I'd rather die than read it." Criticizing a novel by someone else, he praised the author whose "'commendable reticence' in evading the realities of a rape 'might have been taken further, even to the point of not writing the book.'" Defending vegetarianism, he commented that meat-eating is "cannibalism with its heroic dish omitted," and so on. It is his felicity, even above Shaw's other notable qualities, that makes his biographer, when all is said and done, a lucky man, but it did not make his work any easier. Writing about the socialist-turned-theosophist Annie Besant, after her death, Shaw observed that "no truth came to her first as a joke." Many truths came to Shaw that way, but many partial truths and many untruths as well, and it is the ultimate merit of this great literary biography that the world can at last begin to know which was which. □

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'The Geometry of Love'

WILLIAM McPHERSON

THE LETTERS OF JOHN CHEEVER. *Edited by Benjamin Cheever. Simon & Schuster. 397 pp. $19.95.*

HOME BEFORE DARK: A Biographical Memoir of John Cheever. *By Susan Cheever. Houghton Mifflin. 243 pp. $15.95.*

JOHN CHEEVER: A Biography. *By Scott Donaldson. Random House. 416 pp. $22.50.*

John Cheever's life was not as it seemed to the casual observer, and not exactly as he wished it to seem, either. That does not make him unique. He lived for his last twenty years in a storybook house in Westchester with a pond and a woods and a Labrador or two, the kind of house the characters in much of his fiction inhabit, with an attractive wife and their three attractive children and deepening shadows at the edge of the woods. He loved his wife and family. He loved his dogs (but barely tolerated the cats). He loved to skate and swim and go to parties and tell stories. He loved pretty women, and he loved to laugh. He must have been a lot of fun, really, in his better moments: an appealing, witty, charming, diffident man. Also greatly talented, and as greatly tormented—by drink and by unruly sexual desires that, from the evidence, he could neither master nor accept.

He was born in 1912 in Quincy, Massachusetts, the unwanted second son, into a middle-class family of often precarious circumstances and somewhat desperate gentility, whose wishful memories, burnished by time and distance, constructed a history more distinguished if more fanciful than the real and difficult present. His English mother, 39 when John was born, was cool and practical; his father, ten years older, had problems with whisky and his work. Both parents failed him in ways as simple and profound as his father's refusal to teach him to play baseball, as his mother's brusque withdrawal of tenderness.

Years later his mother's get-on-with-it attitude still weighed on him. In 1965, nine years after her death, he wrote Tanya Litvinov: "When I was eleven I was attacked by a virulent strain of tuberculosis. A few days after the crisis my mother covered me with a blanket, gave me a pile of clean rags in which I might bleed and went off to chairman some committee for the General Welfare. As a healthy man I expect I should be grateful to be alive and to have had so conscientious a parent; but what I would like to forget is the empty house and the fear of death."* The day after she died his mother turned up in Westchester, reincarnated as one of his Labradors. (The Cheevers, he says, are "spiritual canines.") "She raised her head very high and spoke to me. The message was quite clear. 'John,' she asked, 'can't you try to be a little neater?'"

His father, who died in 1945, remained "the greatest and most bitter mystery in my life." They had tried to kill one another, he wrote in 1977, yet "it seemed, from adolescence, that we must learn to love one another. Anything less . . . would wreak some basic damage to my spiritual balance. This problem appears in all the books and stories." It is doubtful that they ever learned.

All that was left behind for a while, and not very successfully, in a shallow Massachusetts grave. By the time he was 18 he had been expelled from the Thayer Academy, whether for his poor academic performance, for smoking cigarettes or (as he sometimes claimed later) for seducing the son of a faculty member is unclear, though the evidence leans toward the academic. But art will triumph over life. He wrote a story about his expulsion that Malcolm Cowley accepted for *The New Republic*, there was outrage at Thayer, and Cheever was on his way: to New York City, to Yaddo, to *The New Yorker*, to the sought-after, longed-for world of "radiance, beauty and order, no less," as he wrote in one of his stories.

As it turned out, there was that, fleetingly and sporadically; there was also a lot less. Married in 1941, he served in the Army and moved to Manhattan's Upper East Side, then in 1951 and a father of two, to a rented house on an estate in Scarborough, finally to the old house in Ossining, where he remained until his death in 1982. Along the way he published some 175 short stories, most of them in *The New Yorker*, five novels, and finally was laden with as many awards and honors as a modest man could decently desire. He appeared on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*, and eventually, after the success of *Falconer* in 1977, made enough money to support the country gentleman's life that he had appeared quite successfully to be living for some years; people even thought he kept horses. For most of that time it was only a look, and he never owned a horse. The trajectory was not a smooth ascending curve. "The picture he presented," his son Benjamin writes in his commentary to *The Letters of John Cheever*, "was sharp, witty, cogent, and often false." Cheever was at all times a storyteller. Deception was "part of the trick." Artists are masters of it.

The reality, or the other reality, was that Cheever had a complicated, obscure and difficult relationship—the most intense of his life—with his brother Fred, for whom he named his youngest son. "When I said goodbye to my brother here last May," he wrote to a friend in 1977, "I said that I had killed him in my novel. 'That's splendid, Joey,' he said, 'that's splendid,' and on that we parted." (In Scott Donaldson's version, Fred added, "You've been trying all these years.") Relations with his wife, Mary, were often stormy or silent. A lifelong and increasingly desperate struggle with the bottle led him finally to the Smithers Alcoholism Center in 1975, and sobriety thereafter. He was tormented for most of his life, even after his work had made him famous, by insufficient funds; and he had an occasionally rewarding, more often embarrassing propensity for falling in love—with film stars, with students, with men as well as women—and for pursuing them with considerable vigor and passion, as many of his letters attest.

Love, or the idea of it, was his delight and his torment. "I have always been the lover—never the beloved—" he wrote Litvinov, "and I have spent much of my life waiting for trains, planes, boats, footsteps, doorbells, letters, telephones, snow, rain, thunder, etc." (Three years later he wrote another correspondent, "My claim to always be the lover and never the beloved is quite false," which seems close enough to the facts of his life but not to the myth he made of it.) He was fortunate, at least, in that most of the people he loved seemed worthy of him and at least a couple were devoted, as were his wife, who endured it all, and

William McPherson is the author of Testing the Current *and* To the Sargasso Sea, *both published by Simon & Schuster.*

*Cheever's idiosyncratic spelling and punctuation, preserved in the *Letters*, have been corrected here and elsewhere in this review.

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their children, who put up with a lot too. "My father was drawn to strength," his daughter Susan reports in *Home Before Dark*. "My mother is drawn to need and the sweetness of the needy." Such forbearance can become irritating, and life in the house on Cedar Lane in Ossining was sometimes "almost intolerable."

Still, "Family harmony was the center of my father's sense of personal security," Susan writes. "He did not divorce my mother. He wanted us all together under one roof, joking and smiling and having fun, and he was willing to suppress a great deal to achieve this. It was worth it." That's the way it seemed, at any rate. And toward the end a younger writer, a man Cheever had fallen in love with five years before, became virtually part of the household. It was he, according to Susan, "who really kept my father company during his last illness." Although their relationship was at least at times physical, and from the numerous letters there can be no question of its intensity and passion, to describe them as lovers in the conventional sense seems both to inflate the case—Cheever adored women, after all, which may have been part of the problem—and to demean its significance.

"To scrutinize and examine my feeling for you is idle," Cheever wrote him a short time after they had met:

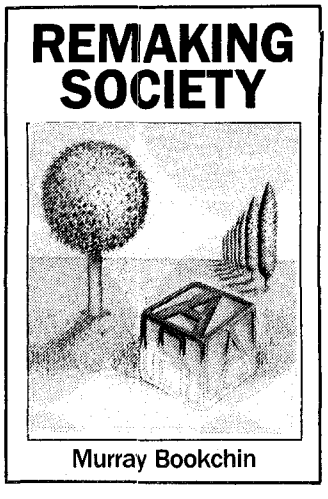
> All my speculations may be no more than the thinking of a lecherous old man who hankers after the skin of someone younger but I will throw this out. Any dizzy analyst would declare that you are the ghost of my dead brother come back from the grave to solace the ghost of my long-gone youth. . . . All I seem to know is that on that morning . . . you seemed to lift from my shoulders an aloneness that I was happy to lose. I can't imagine what your feeling was. My happiness continued through the plane trip and made Palo Alto seem charming. I wanted only that you be there; that if I woke in the night and asked for you I would hear your voice. That it may be my destiny to carry this aloneness forever is a possibility, and it is surely not your destiny, as a young man, to carry my bags.

Cheever hoped and expected, in fact, that his friend would marry and have children (and doubtless live out the public fantasy represented in one of those upscale advertisements featuring a fancy house, a pretty wife and dogs and children: the suburban squire). He wrote the younger writer five months after the letter just cited, "Your description of your love for [an unnamed woman] pleased me deeply since it refreshed my sense of that genuineness of heart I so admire in you and made clear the fact that for both of us the love of a woman is without parallel."

"My father's relationship with Rip," Susan writes, "for all its painfully obvious problems, was as sweet and satisfying a source of love as love could be for him." (One wonders how it was for Rip, who has thus far remained silent. He was, in any event, attentive to the end.)

His daughter is Cheever's best and most insightful biographer, and she sees her father with both clarity and love. Although dichotomies do not exist in nature, as a professor of mine was fond of saying, they can be useful nonetheless, and the dichotomy Susan makes between the two parts of Cheever's life seems a valid one. Again from her memoir, *Home Before Dark*:

> In many ways my father's life can be divided into two distinct parts. The first forty-five years or so were devoted to a struggle for stability: the establishment of a professional reputation, the creation of a family, earning enough money to survive, and most of all the search for some kind of home—some place of his own that might confirm his



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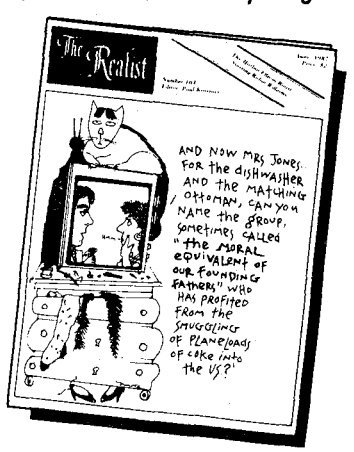
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credentials as a gentleman and soothe his insecurities. The last twenty years of my father's life were spent in a struggle to escape the trappings and traps he had so carefully constructed for himself: to free himself from marriage and the legal and emotional constraints of the conventional upper-middle-class life, to leave behind the torpid stability of the suburbs and the responsibilities of a house and family, and most of all to escape the pressure to continually surpass himself as a writer.

Caught, in the words of the Jackson Browne song, "between the longing for love and the struggle for the legal tender." The name of the song is "The Pretender," and that seems to describe how Cheever often acutely felt about himself, especially as he sobered up and realized how dangerously the life he saw himself living differed from the life that others saw, that he wanted them to see. Feelings are not always amenable to facts. They do not always contradict them either. Cheever found it hard to abide his contradictions.

It is sometimes forgotten, however, that appearances are also real; they do not belie reality, they are a part of it, and the public Cheever was no more chimerical than the private one, the secret one. His marriage may have been difficult, but it was not a sham. His desire for women was genuine. So was his desire for men. Whether this was "love" or not, who knows? Ned Rorem writes in his *Nantucket Diary* that Cheever was never able to empathize with the anxieties or needs of others. He describes him as "an overgrown collegian" and not especially generous, "beyond amorous protestations, except for his pixie charm and, of course, for the fact of his books, which I suppose is generosity itself." Ovid in Ossining (as *Time* labeled him in 1964, shortly before his life began to unravel in earnest, climaxing in the alcoholic crisis of 1975 when he was teaching in Massachusetts, where it all began) was a more accurate epithet than the editors of that magazine in their penchant for alliteration perhaps realized; Ovid too was the author of a "Metamorphoses."

Rorem also says that "despite the diagnosis [of cancer] it's hard to feel he didn't die of something else—of withdrawal from cigarettes and alcohol, not to mention withdrawal from lack-of-guilt." Alcohol, of course, had helped obscure the guilt as well as a lot of other things. By the time he died, Cheever had been sober for seven years, long enough to learn the real secret of success, that it doesn't make any difference (but that it beats its opposite); long enough to contemplate in the cheerless winter light the harsh and stringent Calvinist God who, he wrote in the preface to his *Collected Stories*, played no part in his religious education but who "seemed to abide in the barns of my childhood and to have left me with some undue bitterness." There is no forgiveness for Calvinist guilt, and no redemption. Grace is irresistible, but there is nothing one can do to effect it. The elect of God are saved; the rest are damned, as simply and as inevitably as that. Grace comes, for Cheever, when he almost imperceptibly leaps the bounds of realism and bursts splendid and shining into the lyrical, magical surrealism of his finest stories. He was no moralist, but like Flannery O'Connor, who was a moralist, he was possessed with a determination "to trace some moral chain of being." And he was possessed with (or by) an instinct for form. Thomas Mann defined literature as the union of suffering with the instinct for form.

Since his death Cheever has become a thriving little business. His journals were sold to Alfred A. Knopf for $1 million, twice as much as he commanded for a two-book contract at the pinnacle of his success in 1977 and 1978, after *Falconer* and the *Collected Stories*. A one-volume selection edited by Susan and Benjamin Cheever is expected in 1992. An undetermined number of the uncollected stories will probably be published next year by Academy Chicago Publishers, after considerable acrimonious litigation because, his family claims—a little disingenuously, it would seem—they didn't understand the contract they signed and don't believe he would have wanted some of them republished. Would he have wanted his letters published, the journals he kept all his life, these most intimate, private revelations? It seems unlikely, but the question is now moot. Since Cheever never destroyed this stuff and it was, therefore, bound to come out eventually, he has been well served by his children, who seem motivated less by an urge to capitalize on their father's fame than to understand him (and themselves as well). It is a generous urge. The revelations will not alter his reputation, in any case, and they might do the rest of us some good.

It is possible that our Western concept of the self is itself a chimera, and that the pursuit of it is futile. Perhaps there is only an aggregation of impulses, often contradictory, housed within the in-

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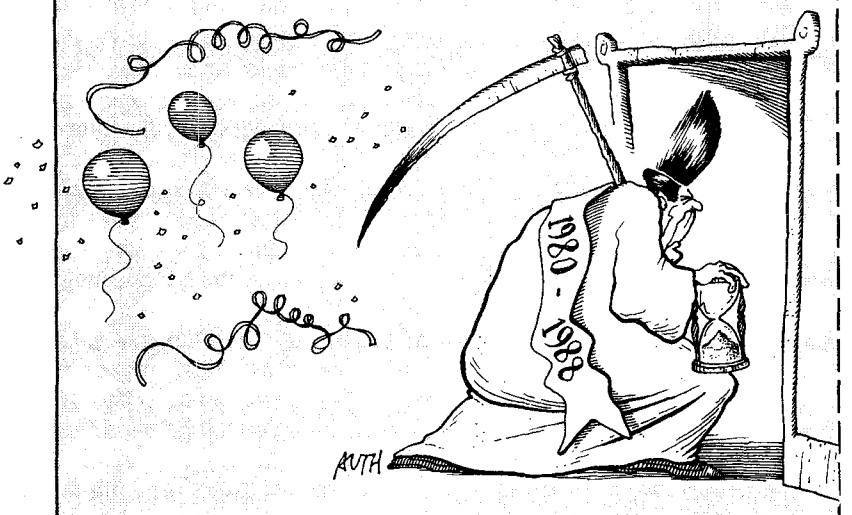
"Humbug!"



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dividual organism. A good biographer might organize these impulses into motifs, then themes that appear and reappear throughout the passage of a life, as in the polyphonic music of Bach, though less tidy. If that is the case, then a biographer would build the life of his subject as Bach built his fugues. Scott Donaldson, whose biography is workmanlike enough, is no Bach. His book contains such less-than-startling revelations as "Cheever believed in the existence and importance of social class." (Mary Cheever told *The Washington Post* last September, "It's dull; I knew it would be dull. That's why I let him do it.") Still, it is a useful collection of information, particularly about the early years. Otherwise there is little in it that is not told—and told far better—in Susan Cheever's more modest memoir, and in the letters, edited by his son Benjamin and considerably aided by his bridging commentaries and the selections from his father's stories and journals. These two books—Susan's and Benjamin's—are about as much biography as most people will need, and the letters, obviously written in the wonderful spontaneity of the moment and never intended to be preserved, are rollicking, sometimes wildly funny, sometimes touching, and often ribald. They are seldom, if ever, philosophical or literary, but for those of us who like to read other people's mail, they provide all the titillation and more that we might reasonably expect.

A writer's flaws, real or imagined, which others may nurture in private behind their pretty suburban facades, are harder to hide: They tend to creep out, if not in the arduously achieved lines of the work, then at least between them. The lines, in fact, may not be possible without them; in fact, certainly not. Flaws are, of course, more immediately interesting than virtues. They make good gossip. They make good copy, better fuel for what Joyce Carol Oates called, in a particularly apt neologism, "pathography," the all warts school of biography. But they no more reveal the elusive truth than does a more rosy-hued approach to the question of the self. There is only one truth, Kafka wrote, but "it is alive and therefore has a live and changing face." All biographers ought to remember that. All reviewers, too. □

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There really were Khazars, of Turkish stock, between the Caucasus and the Volga, the Black Sea and the Caspian. From the seventh century A.D. to the tenth, they got in the way of northern tribes of Bulgars, Magyars, Pechenegs and Vikings that nibbled at Byzantium, and they were also, in the south, very hard on Arabs. About the year 740, the king, his court and the military caste of these Khazars converted inexplicably to Judaism. Two hundred years and a Russian invasion later, they had vanished.

What little we know about them is passing reference—bits and pieces in the tenth century from the Arab geographer Muqaddasi and the Byzantine historian Constantine Porphyrogenitus; dreamy dialogue in a theological tract, *Al Kuzari*, by the Jewish poet and philosopher of Moorish Spain, Judah Halevi; various and conflicting reports from Hebrew, Persian, Syrian and Armenian sources; and meditations on these fragments by modern scholars like Toynbee, Bury, Vernadsky, Dunlop and Antal Bartha, a perplexed Hungarian Marxist.

Until now, most of my romantic notions about Khazars had been borrowed from Arthur Koestler's *The Thirteenth Tribe*. Koestler thought they'd disappeared into the Crimea, the Ukraine, Hungary, Poland and Lithuania, where they turned into precisely those Eastern European Jews who suffered the Holocaust. So much, then, for "Semitism" and a chosen people. Since Koestler by the time he wrote *The Thirteenth Tribe* (1976) had succumbed to the swamp fevers of parapsychology, down among the spoon benders, it wasn't necessary to take him altogether seriously. He's now irrelevant, and so is anything else we imagine we know of the subject. Milorad Pavić has reinvented a Khazaria every bit as exotic and absorbing as Nabokov's Zembla, and much funnier.

Dictionary of the Khazars is easier to read than to describe. If Nabokov comes to mind, so do Pynchon (*Gravity's Rainbow*), Svevo (*Confessions of Zeno*), Borges (*A Universal History of Infamy*, "The Approach to al-Mu'tasim"), Cortazar (*Hopscotch*), Lem (*Solaris*), Eco (*The Name of the Rose*), Chandler (*The Long Goodbye*), Barthes (on magazine ads for Panzani pasta) and the Marx Brothers (Karl and Groucho). I'm not kidding. Without a list, there's no postmodernism. Pavić, a poet and professor of literary history at the University of Belgrade, is also a wag. If—just to pick on the French, although I'm sure he's making fun as well of lots of Balkan heavyweights I never heard of—he is sending up linguists like Saussure, anthropologists like Levi-Strauss, historians like Febvre and Le Roy Ladurie, and deconstructionists like Barthes and Foucault, he's also sending up his own Serbs. The Serbs, he suggests, have a Khazar-like identity crisis. They hunt one another in their dreams, quite like the priests of Princess Ateh, who gave her poems to a parrot.

But there I go already, making difficulties. According to Pavić:

Once upon a time in the eighth century, the Khazar kaghan, a sort of prime minister, had a moonlit dream in which an angel told him: "The Creator is pleased with your intentions but not your deeds." To read this dream the kaghan summoned to his capital Greek, Saracen and Jewish scholars for a great "Polemic." (Pavić willfully insists that the Christian representative was St. Cyril himself. This is because Pavić is making fun of all alphabets, but especially his own Cyrillic: "For this occasion, the Slavonic liturgy was sung in a language only recently tamed; it had been bound and brought from the Balkan expanses to the capital of the world like a small animal in a cage of Glagolitic letters.") These worthies interpreted the kaghan's dream through their separate sets of goggles and kaleidoscopes, after which he converted to their faith. (*Which* faith is not established; each religion thinks it won.) It was downhill from then on until the tenth century, when the Russian Prince Svyatoslav "gobbled up the Khazar Empire like an apple, without even dismounting from his horse."

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Moving right along, as Pavić refuses to do, we find ourselves on the banks of the Danube in 1689, where the Serbian warlord Kyr Avram Brankovich is about to trifle with murderous Turks. Kyr Avram has been secretly compiling a dictionary of the long-lost Khazars, a catalogue of the biographies of the principals in the Polemic. It's hard work. He's had to learn the lingo from a Black Sea parrot who was taught it by the Princess Ateh, from the court of the converted kaghan, before the devil made her mute. He must also rely on what's left of the Great Parchment, a history of Khazaria tattooed on the body of an envoy to the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus, who itched himself to death. Kyr Avram goes to all this trouble because he's pursued in a dream by a red-haired Jew named Cohen, his double, who is also after Khazar secrets.

I must pause here to explain, as Pavić doesn't, that the Dream Hunters are a cult of Khazar priests under the protection of Princess Ateh, who project themselves back and forth in time. They pursue one another but they also pursue, in the "knots" of dreams, the broken body of the original Adam (Cadmon or Ruhani), whose angel-making reassembly, by glossaries and alphabeticons, will solve the universe. This first Adam was originally made of two times, masculine and feminine, "but later the particles of time enclosed in the human form steadily multiplied, and Adam's body multiplied, until it became an enormous state, like the state of nature":

> All his life, the last mortal will search inside Adam's head for an exit, but he will not find it, because the way in and out of Adam's body was found only by Christ. Adam's immense body lies not in space but in time. Now, it is not easy to slip into miracles as into shoes or to make a shovel out of words. Therefore, not only does Adam's soul migrate to all later generations (for the migration of the soul is always the migration of only one single soul, Adam's), but all the deaths of Adam's descendants migrate and return to Adam's death, like particles forming a huge death commensurate in size to Adam's body and life. Imagine white birds migrating and black birds returning from migration.

To complicate matters, the Khazars believed "that to every person belongs one letter of the alphabet, that each of these letters constitutes part of Adam Cadmon's body on earth, and that these letters converge in people's dreams and come to life in Adam's body." The bor-

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derline between God's word and the human word runs between verbs and nouns; God's secret name is a verb. The red-haired Cohen, on awakening from a dream-death in which "all the names of the things around him began dropping off like hats," learns that "the numbers of the Ten Commandments are also verbs, that they are the last to be forgotten when one is forgetting a language and remain as an echo even when the Commandments themselves vanish from memory." Halevi was of the opinion that "vowels are the soul in the body of consonants." Rabbi Isaac Sangari, the Hebrew representative in the Khazar Polemic, felt that "all languages except God's are the languages of suffering, the dictionaries of pain." And so on.

If this isn't deconstruction, I'll eat my discourse.

Anyway, on the banks of the Danube, instead of the Turks, Kyr Avram meets his dream-double, Cohen ("priest" in Hebrew; "kaghan" in Khazar). And you know what happens when doubles meet in modernist literature: The novel dies. Again.

But Kyr Avram's dictionary, consisting of a red, a green and a yellow notebook, one each for the three religions, with a cross, a crescent or a Star of David to identify the source of every entry, doesn't die with him. It's removed from his library in Constantinople, fiddled with by an odd Prussian monk I won't bother to explain, and then published in 1691 by Johannes Daubmannus, in an edition of 500 copies, 498 of which will be burned by the Inquisition. Of the two remaining copies, one has poisoned ink on page nine and the other has a silver lock.

Between the Inquisition and 1982, the pages of the Daubmannus dictionary are dispersed, like the parts of Adam Cadmon's body. They are pursued by three scholars—modernist dream-hunters. Dr. Dorothy Schultz, a Slavist with a split personality; Dr. Abu Muawia, a Hebrew philologist with a hidden agenda, and Dr. Isailo Suk, an Arabist archeologist "with eyes . . . as hairy as testicles," meet to compare notes in Istanbul, the former Constantinople, where two of them are murdered. Who murders whom, and why, depends at least in part on which of Knopf's two editions, one "male" and the other "female," you choose to believe. Except for fifteen italicized lines, on pages 293 and 294, the editions are identical. The difference—having to do with history versus romance, religion versus love—is whimsical rather than profound.

And, of course, whatever edition we hold in our hands proposes itself as an encyclopedia and concordance, containing Kyr Avram's red, green and yellow notebooks, individually alphabetized; fragments, translated from the Latin, of the Daubmannus introduction; prefaces, appendices, footnotes, bibliography, "the sundry material . . . amassed and lost through the centuries by those who, with quills in their earrings, use their mouths as ink bottles," and illustrations that are themselves a kind of cryptogram. You can, and should, open Pavić anywhere you choose and read whatever you want to, backwards, sideways or upside-down. It doesn't matter, because each entry is independent, self-contained and cross-referenced—a chore to write, but pleasingly easy to read. Then all you must do is decide which sort of novel you want to fashion out of these enchantments and mystifications, these brilliant shards of vandalized cultures. "All you need to know to get ahead in science," says Dr. Schultz, "is the last word in your field. With beauty it's not like that." The reader, says Pavić, can

> read the way he eats: he can use his right eye as a fork, his left as a knife, and toss the bones over his shoulder. That will do. He may, of course, wander off and get lost among the words of this book . . . never to find his way back. In that event, the reader has no other choice than to begin in the middle of any given page and forge his own path. Then he may move through the book as through a forest, from one marker to the next, orienting himself by observing the stars, the moon and the cross.

Which is how I did it, wandering dumbfounded through these dreams, looking for a man with a limp, a nose without a partition, a woman with two thumbs on each hand. Think of *Dictionary* as a counteranthropology at least as interesting as any Levi-Strauss field trip to the Bororo or the Nambikwara.

The Khazars, for instance, worship salt, and in their musical language there are seven genders, one of them for lepers only. They can "read colors like musical notes, letters or numbers. When they enter a mosque or a Christian place of worship and see the wall paintings, they immediately spell, read or sing whatever is depicted in the painting, icon or other picture, showing that the old painters knew of this secret and unacknowledged skill."

They "carve all the outstanding events in their lives on a stick, and these signs are in the form of animals that represent situations and moods, not events. The owner's grave is built in the shape of the animal that appears most frequently on his stick. Hence, Khazar graves are divided into groups, depending on whether they are shaped like tigers, birds, camels, lynx, fish, eggs, or goats."

They use fishing nets for sails on some of the ships in their flotilla, and these ships sail like any other. When a Greek asks a Khazar priest how this is done, a nearby Jew replies, "It's simple. They catch in those nets something other than the wind."

They certainly do. They have fast mirrors, reflecting the future, to catch their death; and slow mirrors to settle their debts. They have two calendars because they believe that "passing through the four seasons are two years, not one, and that they move in opposite directions. . . . Both years shuffle the days and seasons like cards, mixing winter days with spring, and summer days with autumn." It's possible for a Khazar "on Monday evening [to] take a different day from his future and use it the following morning, in place of Tuesday. When he came to the day he had taken, he would use the skipped Tuesday in its place, thereby adjusting the total. Under these conditions, of course, the connecting seams of the days could not fit together properly, and cracks appeared in time."

And finally, "The Khazars pray by weeping, for tears are a part of God, by virtue of always having a bit of salt at the bottom, just as shells hold pearls."

I suppose after all this I ought to tell you that *Dictionary*, besides being a spoof of structuralism and deconstruction and organized religion and the Serbian identity crisis, not to mention psychoanalysis (Lacan) and Marxism (Althusser), is also in its sinew antipolitical—except to say that big nations ought not to oppress little ones; and anti-ideological—except in behalf of "love as a compass"; a dreambook advancing the claims of art and the imagination against splitters of hairs and breakers of bones and bloodsucking systems of human engineering; an escape from history; a romance of ghosts: "My native home land is silence, my food—muteness. I sit in my name like an oarsman in a boat. I hate you so much I can't sleep."

And it is, grand and grinning. But I read another novel, upside-down and backwards, and it seems to me that we are all Serbs. □

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The Eclectic Style

DIANA KETCHAM

JULIA MORGAN, ARCHITECT. *By Sara Holmes Boutelle. Abbeville Press. 271 pp. $55.*

Julia Morgan is by current reckoning the most prolific woman architect in history, yet the details of her life have remained a mystery. Between the turn of the century and her retirement in 1951, Morgan produced nearly 800 buildings in her native California, a legacy rivaling that of her contemporary Frank Lloyd Wright. She was responsible for hundreds of houses, churches and schools in San Francisco and its suburbs, major buildings at the University of California, Berkeley, and the elaborate Hearst estates at San Simeon and Wyntoon. Yet as recently as 1972, when her present biographer, Sara Holmes Boutelle, first heard of Morgan on a visit to San Simeon, almost nothing had been written about her life.

Legend had it that Morgan, an American, broke the gender barrier at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. In Northern California, her name was most commonly associated with the regional Craftsman tradition pioneered by her mentor, Bernard Maybeck. Few knew of her as the architect of William Randolph Hearst's San Simeon, since her name does not figure in the contemporary chronicles of life at "Xanadu," as Orson Welles called it. That Morgan was unmarried and reclusive contributed to the stereotype of her as an eccentric career woman. Such was the image reinforced by rare photographs, showing a tiny, bespectacled woman in a severe suit and straw hat, dwarfed by the figure of William Randolph Hearst.

Why was Morgan not better known? One of the revelations of this first biography is the extent to which Morgan herself was architect of her own obscurity. Boutelle reports that she refused to be interviewed or photographed, avoided competitions and discouraged articles about her work (sometimes contradicting the will of Hearst). Before her death in 1957, at the age of 85, she arranged for her plans and office records to be destroyed. It has taken Boutelle fourteen years to reconstruct Morgan's *oeuvre* from the scattered records of former clients.

This biography is an exemplary work in the American success-story genre, a story of application and virtue appropriately rewarded. The eldest daughter of a mining engineer of varying fortunes, Morgan was sent to public schools in Oakland and to the nearby University of California. There is no evidence of her being a prodigy, although as an engineering student at Berkeley in the 1890s she was sufficiently outstanding to attract the notice of the philanthropist Phoebe Apperson Hearst, mother of the newspaper baron. It was typical of Morgan's lifelong independence that she declined Phoebe Hearst's offer to pay for her architecture studies, although she would be employed by her later.

As in the case of her contemporaries Gertrude Stein and Isadora Duncan, Morgan's ambition was a creature of the expansive atmosphere of post-gold rush California. In 1896, on the strength of a rumor that the École des Beaux Arts was about to admit women, Morgan set out for Paris and enrolled in one of the ateliers preparing young men for entrance to the architecture section. After two years, the rule excluding women had been dropped for painting and sculpture but not architecture. Morgan sat for the exam anyway, placing thirteenth in a field of 392.

Returning to San Francisco in 1902, Morgan benefited first from the building boom that followed the 1906 earthquake, and then from the patronage of the Hearsts, mother and son. By far the most riveting drama in the biography is the account of Morgan's twenty-eight-year collaboration with William Randolph Hearst on San Simeon, begun when his mother died in 1919, when Morgan was 47 and he 56, and ceasing only with his final illness, in 1947. Hearst's castle has been much maligned as an aesthetic monstrosity, tainted by its owner's reputation for rapacity and egomania. Boutelle's book goes a long way toward establishing San Simeon's proper place in the history of American patronage, as the Western apogee of the country house and an exercise in imaginative eclecticism verging on the surreal.

The time is now right for rehabilitating the images of both Hearst and Morgan, and in their respectful collaboration on San Simeon both appear well.

Diana Ketcham is the book editor of the Oakland, California, Tribune.

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Morgan shows herself a match for her patron, imposing order on his continually shifting schemes for housing his vast collections. If their common enterprise satisfied Hearst's fantasies of himself as a royal patron, for Morgan it fulfilled a no less passionate infatuation with her professional ideal, the medieval master builder. On this remote Pacific mountaintop she had the opportunity to create a community of nearly a hundred workers and artisans, including muralists, ironworkers, weavers, ceramicists and woodcarvers. Her biographer credits Morgan with keeping these crafts alive until their revival in the Work Projects Administration–sponsored undertakings of the 1930s.

As for the architect's personal life, the biography will disappoint those awaiting dramatic revelation. If Morgan seemed reticent, it may have been because she had so little to tell. She looked after an emotionally disturbed brother until he died, supported her elderly mother and took an interest in the families of her employees. Morgan's only demonstrable oddness is one that goes unremarked on in the great men of her profession: She lived for architecture.

It is in the nature of Morgan's architecture, finally, not misogynist neglect or her own diffidence, that we find the solution to the riddle of her obscurity. Trained as an academic historicist at the Beaux Arts, Morgan moved un-self-consciously among all the revival styles and materials popular with the speculative builders of her day. She favored natural materials early in her career, when redwood was cheap and plentiful. After 1924, when a disastrous fire made redwood as unpopular as brick had become after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, she turned to masonry, tile and a Mediterranean style drawing on Spanish Colonial, Renaissance and Italian Gothic models. Derivative, eclectic, non-ideological, Morgan's kind of architecture had fallen to the nadir of intellectual respectability by the time her career was ending in the 1950s, and she knew it. Boutelle speculates that at the end Morgan may have wished to keep her records out of the hands of unsympathetic scholars. But now, as the pendulum of taste swings back to historicism, her reputation will surely benefit.

Will posterity admit Morgan to the ranks of the great architects? Not if it accepts the equation of greatness with originality on the level of Frank Lloyd Wright's. But the appearance of *Julia*

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Morgan, Architect is significant as a symptom of the forgiving spirit of the latest intellectual fashions: It reflects the eagerness with which the architectural intelligentsia is now embracing an "impure" architecture. One hopes that it reveals, too, the readiness of feminists to welcome as models professional women of less than heroic status. Morgan was good enough—an able designer and a truly remarkable professional—to deserve this handsome record of her long life's work. □

Healing Divisions

BRIAN MORTON

BORDER COUNTRY. *By Raymond Williams. Hogarth Press. 351 pp. $8.95.*

SECOND GENERATION. *By Raymond Williams. Hogarth Press. 347 pp. $8.95.*

THE FIGHT FOR MANOD. *By Raymond Williams. Hogarth Press. 207 pp. $8.95.*

(All three novels are distributed by Random House.)

There's a wonderful moment in Raymond Williams's discussion of Emily Brontë in *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence.* He quotes Cathy's famed declaration of love for Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*: "If all else perished and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it." These words, Williams writes,

> have been called mystical, or a romantic extravagance, but I don't know how that can be said if we listen and follow the action. That kind of bond, that sense of absolute presence, absolute existence in another . . . is indeed an ordinary though of course always a transforming experience. In many lives, again and again, it is the central reality . . . and indeed quite often doesn't need to be emphasized: the reality of the relationship is simply there and unbreakable.

This is vintage Williams. In a career that spanned forty years, this was always his characteristic note: a sober insistence that we have resources greater than we usually credit ourselves with.

"An ordinary though of course always a transforming experience." If one were to make a list of the key words in Williams's vocabulary, "ordinary" would surely be among them. In an early essay, "Culture Is Ordinary," he writes about the Welsh village where he grew up:

> Where I lived is still a farming valley. . . . My father . . . left the farm at fifteen to be a boy porter on the railway, and later became a signalman, working in a box in this valley until he died. . . . Learning was ordinary: we learned where we could. Always, from those scattered white houses, it had made sense to go out and become a scholar or a poet or a teacher. Yet few of us could be spared from the immediate work; a price had been set on this kind of learning, and it was more, much more, than we could individually pay. Now, when we could pay in common, it was a good, ordinary life.

Williams is one of the few socialist intellectuals to come from something like a classic working-class background—he was able to attend Cambridge University only because he won one of its rare scholarships. In part because of this history, he had an unusually complex social vision. Familiar with the world of the British worker as well as the world of the Oxbridge elite, he was never tempted to sentimentalize or to caricature either. He wrote of the ethic of neighborliness of working-class Wales, but also its intellectual constrictions; he wrote of the "dialogue of the centuries" that went on in the centers of learning, but also of arrogant men there "contracted in sympathy." His arguments for a common culture and for a classless society were rooted in the recognition that class division tends to deform life on both sides of the divide.

Williams's writing is hard to classify—most of his work combines elements of literary criticism, cultural criticism and social history. This disregard for the normal disciplinary boundaries was a matter of principle: He was an enemy of the division of labor, from the "separation between mental and manual labor, between administration and operation, between politics and social life" to the "last recess of the division of labor . . . this recess within ourselves, where what we want and what we believe we can do seem impassably divided." So it isn't surprising that he devoted so much of his

Brian Morton is an editor of Dissent.

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energy to the writing of novels – the least abstract literary form, the form that brings us closest to life as it's lived. Williams wrote five novels; the most important are those in what he called the Welsh trilogy, which is now available in the United States for the first time. (*Border Country* and *Second Generation* have been out of print since the 1960s; *The Fight for Manod* has never been available before.) It's a risk for a social critic to write a novel: Beliefs that seem convincing in the abstract sometimes look strangely undernourished when put to the test of character and action. I'm glad that Williams took the risk. He wrote good novels.

In *Border Country* (1960), Matthew Price travels from London to Wales to be with his father, who has suffered a heart attack. Matthew, who is closely based on Williams, had left Wales as a young man to attend an English university on a scholarship. His father had encouraged this, even urged it; but in moving to the city, in following an academic career, in living a life so different from anything his parents knew, Matthew has come to feel as if he's abandoned or even betrayed his origins.

Matthew never lost his feeling for his parents and for the village of Glynmawr – but his memories seemed to him mere nostalgia, bearing no connection to his current life. Spending day after day back in Glynmawr, he begins to realize that the division between his two worlds is less sharp than he had supposed. In an early scene, he begins to feel this even in the way he sees the countryside:

> It was one thing to carry its image in his mind, as he did, everywhere, never a day passing but he closed his eyes and saw it again, his only landscape. But it was different to stand and look at the reality. It was not less beautiful; every detail of the land came up with its old excitement. But it was not still, as the image had been. It was no longer a landscape or a view, but a valley that people were using. He realized, as he watched, what had happened in going away. The valley as landscape had been taken, but its work forgotten. . . . On a low skyline a tractor was moving, in an area that he remembered as wooded but that now had been cleared and fenced. . . . Lower down, a field was being ploughed by tractor, and a strip at the edge of it was spread with lime, the quick white standing out sharply against the turned earth. . . . This was not anybody's valley to make into a landscape. Work had changed and was still chang-

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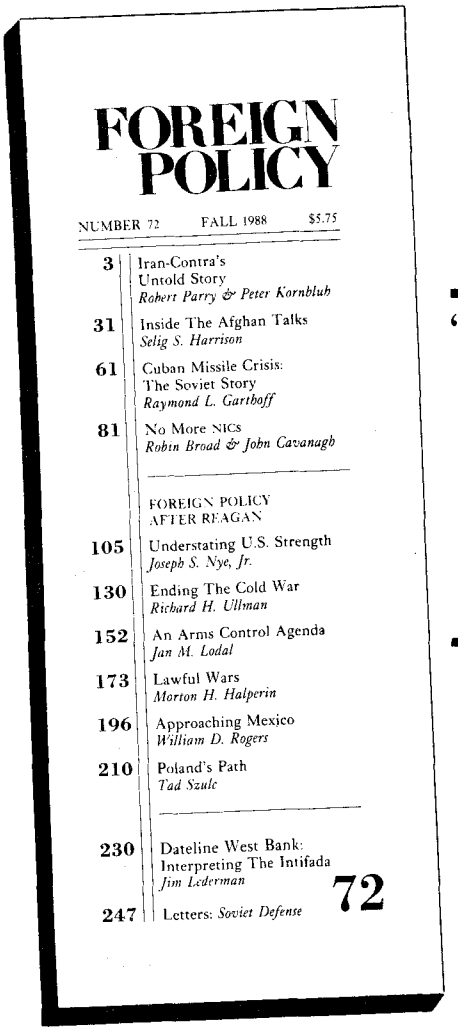
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ing it, though the main shape held.

In his chapter on Thomas Hardy in *The Country and the City*, Williams writes that the most significant thing about Hardy is that "he succeeded, against every pressure, in centring his major novels in the ordinary processes of life and work." Much of *Border Country* is an account of the ordinary processes of life and work of Matthew's father, Harry Price. Price is a railway signalman, as was Williams's own father; but having come from a farming family, remaining attached to the traditions of his youth, Harry spends much of his time farming rented strips of land, cultivating apple and pear and plum trees, gooseberries and currants. I think we're meant to see this as an effort, heroic but doomed, to refuse the divisions forced on him by social change. The slow and patient rhythm of Harry's work on the land, described in absorbing detail, becomes the dominant rhythm of the book itself. Without insisting on it in any obvious way, Williams reminds us how much of every life is taken up with working, and how deeply we're shaped by the work we do.

In living through the crisis of his father's illness, Matthew finally learns that his values are at root his father's values; that his life is a continuation of the inquiry that his father had carried on in his. As one of the people of Glynmawr tells him, "A life lasts longer than the actual body through which it moves."

In *Politics and Letters*, a book-length interview with the editors of *New Left Review*, Williams talked about his intentions in writing *Border Country*. It seems he wanted to show Harry Price's values as admirable, but finally insufficient. He intended the book to be a dialogue between the values of the country and the values of the city, between community and individualism, between custom and education. But this doesn't really come through. One reason is that Matthew isn't made vivid enough—what he's gained by moving to the city and to education is assumed rather than presented. But the larger reason is that Harry Price is so lovingly portrayed that his shortcomings seem trivial: The book succeeds most fully as an homage to a man and to a way of life.

So *Border Country* isn't the book that Williams intended to write. But I don't say this as a criticism. Sometimes the power of a novel can be measured by the degree to which it defies its author's intentions. *Border Country* is a moving and rewarding book.

Second Generation, unfortunately, obeys Williams's intentions meekly. First published in 1964, the novel centers on two working-class families who have settled in England, forced out of Wales by the long economic depression there. Harold Owen is a shop steward in an auto factory; his wife, Kate, is a Labor Party activist; their son Peter is a student at Oxford and a political radical. In this family, an honorable commitment to social change has led to an impoverishment of personal life. Harold's brother Gwyn and his wife, Myra, also work at the auto factory; the two of them stay away from politics, centering their lives in their home and their child. Williams explores the contrast sensitively: His examination of Harold and Kate's home life is unsparing; but he also shows that Gwyn and Myra's attempt to escape from politics is doomed.

This is only the most obvious of the carefully presented contrasts that run through *Second Generation*: those between personal and political life; between manual and intellectual work; between the need to change the world and the need to settle in it. But there's little urgency of feeling here; the book is finally a mere novel of ideas. Exploring disconnections, Williams fell victim to his theme, for he has only an abstract connection to the people he's writing about. He doesn't get nearly as close to life here as he does in his best nonfiction: In a twenty-page essay on Lawrence and Tolstoy in *Modern Tragedy*, he said more about love, work and family—and said it more passionately and more clearly—than in all the 347 pages of *Second Generation*.

In *The Fight for Manod* (1979), the ideas and the feeling come together. Matthew Price, twenty years older than when we met him in *Border Country*, is recovering from a heart attack. For the reader who knows Price from the earlier book, it's a shock to re-encounter him here: We knew him as a young man, trying to prepare himself for his father's death; now we see him, prematurely old, trying to prepare for his own.

Price is asked by the Labor government to serve as a consultant to work on a plan to build a model city in an impoverished area of Wales. He and his wife move to the village of Manod to assess how the development would affect the people who live there.

Peter Owen, the radical student in *Second Generation*, now a radical soci-

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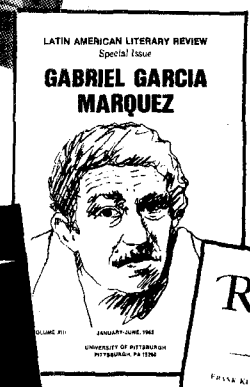

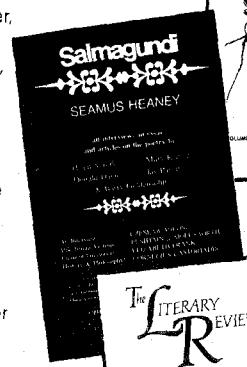

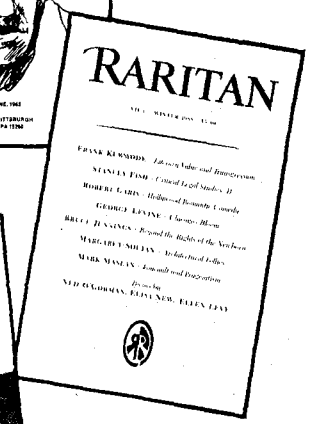

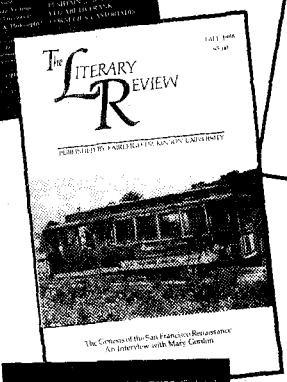

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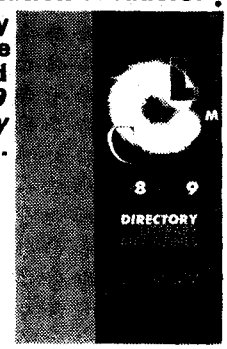

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ologist, is brought on to work alongside Price. Owen discovers that the plan to develop Manod has its roots in an illicit collusion between the government and a multinational corporation, and that the goal of the plan has nothing to do with the welfare of the people of Manod. The crisis of the book comes as Owen and Price react to this discovery. Owen wants simply to derail the plan. Price is as disturbed as Owen by the project's true nature, but he can't go along with Owen's attempt to block it without putting something else in its place. What is most evident to him is that Manod has a terrible need for some sort of social renewal, and at the novel's end he's still trying to find something to salvage from the plan.

Price is clearly the center of this book, and he's presented much more sympathetically than Owen is. But Williams takes great pains not to show Owen as simply wrong. Owen is drastic, wild, unwilling to compromise—yet I think we're meant to respect his impatience and to see that there's something a little sentimental in Price's endless hopefulness. It would be too pat to say that Williams believes that Price and Owen need each other—in fact, they don't work well together at all, and by the e[nd] of the book Owen seems to think of Pric[e] as little more than a dupe. But what I find impressive is the way Williams understands each of these characters without condescension. You might say that this dimension of *The Fight for Manod* is a picture of the relations between the old left and the new; and I don't know of any more generous-minded account of their differences.

In his literary criticism, Williams often lamented the death of the nineteenth-century tradition whereby novelists like Tolstoy and Eliot examined personal and social life at the same time, giving equal weight to each. Williams is clearly trying to revive that tradition in *The Fight for Manod.* Near the end of the book, as the pressures converge, Price has a second heart attack. He recovers, but it's clear that he won't live much longer, and that he'll never witness the social transformations he's worked toward all his life. In the last pages of the book, Price and his wife stand on a peak from which they can see both Manod and his childhood home of Glynmawr:

> Where they were standing, looking out, was on a border in the earth and in history: to north and west the great ex-

December 5, 1988

> ses of a pastoral country; to south where the iron and coal ki[n]ed, the crowded valleys, ly, [n]ow in their turn cast [o]ut now in their turn was the[n] been a con- for rene[w] border, its way t[o] lives that deeply com[e]w, was always [t]. the past. And present that cou[ld] were then hard to [g]rip . . . hard to bring together to a rhythm, to a movement. . . . This actual movement had conditions of time, of growth, quite different from the conditions of any single life, or of any father and son.

For readers who have known Price through two books, the effect of this is complex. We feel something like sorrow, because he's dying; but we see his life as part of a larger project, which will be taken up by others. Or perhaps the stress should fall the other way: We see his life as part of a larger project, which will be

DANIEL BERRIGAN
Poetry, Drama, Prose
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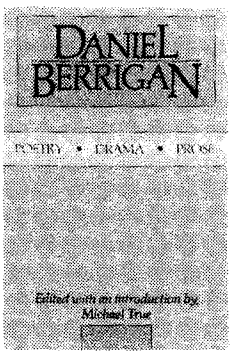

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taken up by others; but we feel something like sorrow, because he's dying. The point is that we can't separate our responses: Sadness and hope, the personal and the social, death and continuity are fused. In Williams's best work, the conventional divisions don't apply.

Certain weaknesses run through these novels—interesting weaknesses. In his literary criticism, Williams always had sharp things to say about the dominant modern form of the novel, what he called the "fiction of special pleading," which will "take only one person seriously"; and in his novels he tried to take all his characters seriously, to present them all as ends in themselves. But I'm not sure how fully he succeeded. Many of his characters are subtly and sensitively drawn. But the only ones who really stay in the mind are Matthew and Harry Price—Williams himself and his father. As Williams recognized, the fiction of special pleading has been forced on writers by the twentieth century: The disappearance of what he called "knowable communities" has rendered it difficult to gain imaginative access into other people's lives. As a critic he could point out the shortcomings of the fiction of special pleading, but as a novelist he couldn't go beyond it.

There are moments in these books, especially in *Second Generation*, in which moralism overwhelms his feeling for the complexity of things. In a study of George Orwell, Williams criticized him for the way he portrayed sexual life: "It is not the ordinary and continuing love of men and women, in friendship and in marriage, but a willed corruption . . . the lonely confusion of the adolescent." So one looks with interest at *Second Generation*, the only one of these books in which he writes about sexual relations. In the course of the book Peter Owen briefly leaves his fiancée to return to a former lover, and Kate Owen, feeling constrained by life with her husband, sleeps with another man. Williams writes about this with a refreshing seriousness: Kate and Peter aren't having "affairs"; they're putting their lives in question, they're searching for a wider life. But he resolves this strand of the book too simply, as both Kate and Peter see the error of their ways, come back to their mates and stand around delivering unlikely speeches about the need to "live where we are." I like the way he puts sex in the context of relationship, but I think he insists on it too much. He seems to have no feeling for the waywardness of desire. In general, I think, he has a lack of feeling for the complexity of emotional life, for the way the most generous and hateful and irresponsible impulses are jumbled together in any mind. Sometimes Williams's people seem too good to be true.

There are other curious lapses in these books. Williams's imaginative universe is almost exclusively male. Except for Kate Owen in *Second Generation*, the women in these books are little more than names on the page. While Matthew Price, for instance, is followed through two books, his wife, Susan, remains a shadowy helpmate. In a writer who tried so hard to see life whole, this lapse is especially odd.

But a novel, as Randall Jarrell defined it, is a prose narrative of some length that has something wrong with it. Whatever their shortcomings, these are serious and valuable books.

Williams died in January, at 66, of a heart attack. The obituary notices, on both sides of the Atlantic, sounded a remarkably uniform note. Stuart Hall spoke of his "generosity"; Terry Eagleton of his "humanity"; E.P. Thompson

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of his "patient, calmly arguing voice." These people knew Williams as a friend; but many of us who knew Williams only through his work were surprised by the quite personal feeling of loss we had after his death. But from the way Williams wrote about his own view of death, I have a feeling he would have disapproved of any large claims about how his death has diminished us.

Near the end of *The Fight for Manod*, Matthew Price is in the hospital after his second heart attack. A visitor is surprised to learn that Price intends to continue with his political work:

> Robert Lane sighed. "It will be a lot of work, Matthew. Are you sure you have the strength?"
>
> "For a long fight, yes. Yes, we do."
>
> "That wasn't what I was asking."
>
> "No, but it's still the answer."

I'm not entirely comfortable with the briskness of Price's answer. But it seems characteristic of Williams, the enemy of division: He refused to grant the division between life and death. A life, after all, "lasts longer than the actual body through which it moves." □

Talking Cures

BHARATI MUKHERJEE

THE GREAT DIVIDE: Second Thoughts on the American Dream. *By Studs Terkel. Pantheon. 439 pp. $18.95.*

NEW AMERICANS: An Oral History: Immigrants and Refugees in the U.S. Today. *By Al Santoli. Viking Press. 392 pp. $19.95.*

Studs Terkel throws a party and half of Chicago—he makes all of America seem like Chicago—shows up. This time, ninety-six loquacious, feisty (and sometimes tedious) monologuists have knocked on the door, Augie March–style, to make their record. It's a careful guest list, well balanced between the races, ages, classes and sexes. Terkel is our last New Dealer, and his favorite characters are heavily represented: eccentrics, union activists, communitarians, lively bureaucrats. Foreigners will have a hard time trying to sort out all the contradictions. And Americans should weep, for this is a book about the moral effects of Reaganomics, the loss of memory and community, the dumbing and numbing of America.

One finds partial redemption in the company of Al Santoli's nineteen "New Americans" (equally divided among Asians, Europeans and Latin Americans, plus one Eritrean), the embodiments of our latest immigrant wave. They bring with them an almost terrifying industriousness and communal (if not patriotic) dutifulness that borders on the Confucian. They also carry unusual baggage. In Santoli's New America, your Cambodian coffee shop waitress might have survived a genocide, and your Korean door-to-door wig-seller is likely to be an Old World M.A. If you live in any big American city, so might your taxi driver, your fruit vendor or your doorman.

In his introduction, Terkel associates "The Great Divide" with the collapse of memory, the abandonment of shame and loyalty. On one side of the divide are those who remember (war, the Depression, union activism, civil rights marches, big bands, civic and national decency, neighborhoods); on the other side are the mnemonectomized (by schools, drugs, yuppieism, television) who cannot. A young college instructor, speaking of his freshman students, notes that "it's not just the ignorance that's disturbing. It's the acceptance of ignorance." Art Spiegelman, author and artist of *Maus*, finds his drawing students ignorant of artists before Andy Warhol—"he was a television celebrity and television is their culture." An old-time civil rights activist cannot get across to campus newshounds that there were actually *two* historical Hoovers in this century. Class consciousness—but not class distinctions—has disappeared. Terkel notes that the important distinction these days is between winners and losers, not oppressors and victims. The poor are wimps; they should be ashamed. Frequently they are.

Perhaps the dividing line is best summed up in the familiar phrase, "That's history." To a French student, the phrase means necessity, inevitability, a point of analytical departure. To American students, it is the excuse for amnesia and a lack of accountability: Vietnam is a series of movies, an experience they wish they'd shared; the other wars, the Depression, happened before television; Richard Nixon is the background noise in *All the President's Men;* voting Republican is both respectable and rebellious, a way of identifying with Rambo and the Terminator. One sees how they, children of the tube with their heads clenched between Walkman plugs, can nod in agreement with George Bush, "We are the change." They're affable young barbarians.

The symbol of the Great Divide is, of course, Dan Quayle's political father, Ronald Reagan. The man who honors the SS dead at Bitburg inspires the political son who's never heard of the Holocaust. Reagan is proof that a winner need not be truthful, knowledgeable or compassionate. One reborn Chicago Christian boasts, "President Reagan does not represent what I feel. He uses a lot of Godly references, but I don't feel he's a Christian in any sense of the word. Jimmy Carter was a Christian. . . . I voted for [Reagan] because this is a worldly world, not a Christian world." Terkel has encountered dozens who don't agree with a thing that Reagan does, who see him as a clown, a jerk, a straw man, but still vote for him because of the feel-good factor. What can you say to Christians who vote for Reagan *because* he's unchristian? To a scab who calls himself pro-labor? To a Chicago barkeep who says, "I have to like Ronald Reagan because I'm one of those who feel you should live within your means"?

The Great Divide also operates in another way; it is the separation between hope and pessimism, between delayed gratification (saving, investing, educating, building, providing) and a kind of headlong, credit-busting hedonism. A black editorial writer for the *Chicago Tribune* describes the great divide between generations, noting especially the despair that engulfs so many inner-city blacks in the 1980s (unlike the still hopeful 1960s) who see no way out. The country is now composed of numerous such ghettos—the ghettos of race and ethnicity, class and profession; ghettos of age and of occupation and levels of education.

Terkel also unleashes a number of commodity brokers and advertisers—conventional "winners" in today's competition. "I'm a copywriter for an ad agency," says one young woman, in flip comic tones. "It involves being a total asshole." Later, as she reflects, she sums up a generation's frustration: "I look where my parents live right now and I could never imagine having a place like

Bharati Mukherjee's most recent book is The Middleman and Other Stories *(Grove Press). She teaches literature at Queens College of the City University of New York.*

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When Alexander Cockburn's **Corruptions of Empire** was first published a year ago, reviewers were cautious. From London came the stinging assessment of *The Caribbean Times*: "Cockburn's word talent is immense, his sentence flair superb." *Publishers Weekly* was similarly reserved: "Never less than ferociously entertaining."But after the caution of such early assessments came bolder reviews: "Funny, brutal and nostalgic." – *Los Angeles Times*; "Outspoken, intellectual,uncompromising, combative, witty..."– *The Utne Reader*; "A marvelous crafter of the telling image."– *The Observer*; "Fine intelligence and exhilarating zeal."– *Texas Observer.*

And finally the unstinting praise that caused Cockburn to hire builders to move before him widening doors so that he could get his head through: "The foremost progressive commentator in the US...de Tocqueville laid down a legacy that Cockburn, almost single-handedly, now carries on."– *The Guardian*; "Probably the most gifted polemicist writing in English today."– David Rieff, *Times Literary Supplement.* Oh yes, the "probably" in that last quote hurt a little, but all in all, not bad. "The foremost...de Tocqueville." Not bad at all.

And there were further testimonials to the volume's superb qualities. Silence from the *New York Times*. Five pages of dog's abuse from Henry Fairlie* in *The New Republic*, three more pages of vilification in *The New Leader* from Stefan Kanfer.** Unkind words from James Woolcott*** in *Vanity Fair.*

Amid raptures such as these, **Corruptions of Empire** was rushed through reprint after reprint. One lady of progressive opinions in San Francisco was given no less than five copies for Christmas. Now, in time for the holiday season, come bigger, better **Corruptions**. An index. A full listing of all contents. A new section of material on the 1988 election. Here are portraits of the campaign and the contenders. For example, an early assessment of Michael Dukakis: "The governor emerges as your average politician seeking the presidency: driven, repressed, compulsive, anal-retentive, megalomaniac, self-deceiving, somewhat of an iceberg, with seven-eighths of his personality submerged in psychic darkness."

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*Errant drunk and biblioklept

**A man with the distinction of being the paid creature of both Martin Peretz and the Luce Empire

***I remember him from the *Village Voice*. Back then he had the sweaty pallor and lifeless hair of the fanatic masturbator. An autodidact, he spent his days reading *The Observer* and memorizing lines from Clive James. These days his style and intellectual development seem stalled forever in knowing ignorance, trapped in the vulgarity of *Vanity Fair.*

Corruptions of Empire: $13.95/paper

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that. They have a house on four acres, two cars. And they sent us to college. The sick thing is my father makes maybe $10,000 a year more than I do. I'm one person and he's raised a family of four."

The Great Divide, despite Terkel's ebullience and enthusiasm for certain charming activists willing to endure prison and derision, is a depressing book. This time, there's no clear enemy out there wielding cattle prods and bullhorns, no unjust war, no urgent domestic agenda. Terkel is staring down the basilisk of ignorance and forgetfulness.

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If Terkel's baby boomers forget too much, Santoli's immigrants remember too much. If American children have forgotten the potato famines and Czarist pogroms of their ancestors, these newest Americans, survivors of unspeakable wars, bear fresh scars. A 50-year-old Cambodian widow, who runs her own four-table donut shop off a freeway near Los Angeles, recalls, "We came upon an orphanage full of babies. The nurses had fled. . . . Mats were thrown on the orphanage courtyard, loaded with cookies. All the children were crawling around it. Hundreds of babies—eight months, two months, one month old. None of them old enough to walk." Now guilt haunts her in her donut shop. Her eldest daughter, who lost a husband and infant in the war and who survived the Khmer Rouge labor camps by catching and eating lizards, crabs, worms and bugs, constructs a new life for herself as the wife of an American trucker. We have stepped far outside the frame of a Norman Rockwell painting. The familiar has become exotic; the exotic familiar.

Perhaps Santoli's most exotic immigrant group are the Hmong, many of whom settled in Minnesota. The adult Hmong, simultaneously Christian and animist, believe in a powerful spirit world. Ghosts must be appeased. A baby's umbilical cord must be buried under a "ghost-pole" inside the home. But in Minnesota, Hmong-American babies are born in hospitals and umbilical cords are thrown out as medical waste. The children don't fear darkness like their grandparents because they can bring on light with the flick of a switch. In one childhood, a Hmong in America moves through centuries.

New Americans is an upbeat book. Santoli avoids accounts of the more brutal cultural and generational conflicts among immigrants—the teen-age suicides, the gangs, the incidence of anorexia and so forth. He has nothing to say of America's ever inventive forms of discrimination and assault, nor does he take account of the friction between America's perennially disadvantaged minorities and the rapidly rising Asians in their midst. *New Americans*' mission is to update mainstream America's picture of immigrants huddled on Ellis Island waiting to be free. And it does this well. The New Americans are more likely to land by jet in Los Angeles, or come overland from Latin America. They're as likely to possess skills that will place them immediately in the top 1 percent of wage earners as they are to be equipped for little except exploited labor at less than minimum wage. They are almost certain to look different—very different—from the traditional immigrant icon. They're less likely to "melt" and perhaps are less willing to do so.

Looked at closely, however, one sees far more points of continuity than disjuncture. We're probably only a few years away from a *What Makes Choon-Li Run?* or a Hmong *Call It Sleep*.

The beauty of America—I don't mean this ironically, though I am speaking metaphorically—is its ability to transform the trauma of a distant genocide into a Dunkin' Donuts franchise. It is also the horror of America that the world's deepest miseries get commodified into sugary cutouts. A concerned reader should see Terkel's despair and Santoli's hope as near-balancing terms in the late-century American equation. On its own, each book feels lopsided, too agenda-ridden. They should be read together, as antidotes to each other's excesses. □

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FILMS.

STUART KLAWANS

A Cry in the Dark
Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown
The Lair of the White Worm

The first time is tragedy; the second time is farce. The third, evidently, is a horror movie. The wonders of coincidence have given us Meryl Streep, falsely accused of demonism; Carmen Maura, struggling hilariously with the demons of love; and Amanda Donohoe, vamping her way through a Satanist fantasy. All three, to borrow the title of Carmen Maura's vehicle, are women on the verge of a nervous breakdown—or at least on the verge of giving one to their audience. What's curious is that the least successful of these three films should somehow be the most disturbing.

A Cry in the Dark is more or less standard docudrama, based on the trials of Lindy Chamberlain (Meryl Streep) and her husband, Michael (Sam Neill). In 1980, the Chamberlains took their children camping at Ayers Rock, the Australian outback's main tourist attraction. It's an impressive spot, bleak and eerie, and wild enough to be a prowling ground for feral dogs. One of these snatched the Chamberlains' 9-week-old baby girl. The child was never found; but that was only the beginning of the nightmare. On the flimsiest of evidence—on no evidence, really—Lindy Chamberlain was accused of having murdered her baby. The accusations at first were no more than gossip. Then they turned into persistent rumors in the media; and finally they assumed the form of a criminal indictment. Chamberlain was brought to trial, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.

At this point, one needs to say what this film does *not* entail. It is not an exposé of a miscarriage of justice (such as the recent *The Thin Blue Line* or last year's far more compelling *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*). It is not a story about victims of the media. It does not bring you very close to Lindy and Michael Chamberlain. It is not a fable about mob hysteria. *A Cry in the Dark* has elements of all these without fully realizing any one and without achieving a convincing blend. Instead—perhaps intentionally, perhaps not—the film becomes an essay on the profound, mysterious, implacable power of stupidity. There simply is no reason—at least, none the filmmakers have dramatized—for Lindy Chamberlain to have undergone this ordeal. Fred Schepisi, as director and co-author of the screenplay, has provided some hints of an explanation: the eagerness of a less than competent police force to prove itself; the media's insatiable hunger for scandal; an apparent mistrust of the Chamberlains' religion (Seventh Day Adventist). But these factors, at least as presented here, don't begin to account for the way the accusations against Lindy Chamberlain took on a life of their own.

This mystery is the film's strongest attraction—perhaps its only one. The Chamberlains, as characters, amount to little, since they are passive throughout. Something happens to them at Ayers Rock, and after that things just keep on happening to them; at no point do they stop being acted upon and start to act. Michael gradually turns into even more of a stiff than he seems at the beginning; Lindy eventually shows some talent for self-assertion. That's it for human interest. As for the details of the case, Schepisi unfolds them in the workmanlike manner one would expect from the more uplifting made-for-TV legal dramas. Throughout the film, he throws in a repeated dolly-forward shot as his concession to style; and that's it for dynamism. Everything else is as conventional as the way the script lays out plot points. Given a summary of the Chamberlain case, you could just as well visualize the film yourself, without missing anything except the brown pageboy wig they've plunked onto Meryl Streep's head.

And yet I think *A Cry in the Dark* will nag at me. Something horrendous happened in this case, something suggested in the many short scenes in which citizens of Australia—from beer-guzzling roughnecks to matrons at their dinner tables—discuss the Chamberlains. Everybody seems to have been caught up in the case; everybody had an opinion, and many of the opinions were violent. We see, at one point, an ordinary, sane-looking woman approach Lindy Chamberlain on the street and spit in her face. I wish Schepisi had found a way to concentrate on that woman and her feelings, rather than carpenter together yet another pedestrian, true-life story. But still, the woman was there. I will not forget the sight of her spittle, nor Lindy Chamberlain's

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amazed laughter at her madness.

In 1985, when the Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar first reached the United States, he greeted the audience at a screening of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* by saying, "This is my fourth film, and I want you to tell me everything you don't like about it. Be very frank, because I want my fifth to be *exactly* the film you want to see."

With his latest effort, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, the accommodating Almodóvar may have succeeded. He has even translated his willingness to please into a self-portrait of sorts. Cruising through the film, in one of its best small roles, is Guillermo Montesinos, his hair dyed bright yellow and sculpted into a pompadour. He is the driver of the Mambo Taxi. His cab's interior, as gaudy and overstuffed as the film itself, is decorated like a 1950s nightclub, outfitted with drinks, pharmaceuticals, all the latest glamour magazines, a sign reading "Thank You for Smoking" and whatever music you'd like to hear—although, as the cabbie says, mambo goes best with the decor. At one point, when Pepa (Carmen Maura) steps into the cab, she has been crying and wants eyedrops. The cabbie is crestfallen—it's the one item he does not stock. But the next time the Mambo Taxi picks her up, when Pepa *really* needs the eyedrops, the driver is ready to hand them over with a smile.

Does *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* really deliver *exactly* what you want? Maybe not, but it tries hard, and with a truly generous spirit. One might read Almodóvar's attitude as crass show-biz cynicism. Certainly he toyed with that image at the screening I've described; and, as a nonbeliever in *What Have I Done*, I was willing to grant him the role. So this review is a public apology for my private doubts. If Almodóvar is so eager to please, it is because he believes in the redemptive power of entertainment—which is a lovely creed for a filmmaker.

Indeed, entertainment is the theme of *Women on the Verge*. Pepa is a TV actress, best known for portraying the mother of a serial killer. She also dubs the soundtracks of films, which is how she has met the philandering Ivan. His voice has seduced a million women; and he has seduced Pepa in the flesh. Now that she has been abandoned, she starts to fall apart. Although she wants nothing more than to speak with Ivan, the coward won't even talk to her on the telephone. Is Pepa going to play out a Madrid version of Cocteau's *La Voix Humaine*? Not this actress.

"I'm sick of being good," she announces, having just set fire to her bed. She puts on her tube skirt and high heels, prepares a pitcher of spiked gazpacho and ventures forth into the city, intending to track Ivan down. In this she is unsuccessful, but she somehow magnetizes any number of other people involved with Ivan, all of whom wind up in her apartment. Soon she is dealing with Ivan's castoff wife, his stammering son, the son's hard-faced girlfriend, a couple of policemen in search of Shiite terrorists, and a feminist lawyer. There is also her friend Candela (María Barranco), whose own crisis is so severe that her earrings, in the shape of little espresso pots, can barely stop jiggling. How does Pepa deal with all this? She acts, of course, blithely and brazenly playing out whatever reality she requires at the moment. Though she may be on the verge of a nervous breakdown, she still can enjoy the experience. It is, after all, only theater—as the great salsa singer La Lupe tells us over the final credits, her vocal cords near to rupturing with the entertainment of it all.

One cannot discuss such a farce, with its love for show-business artifice, and not mention the word "camp." Almodóvar's is a gay sensibility, which treats women and their emotions as if they were artifacts from a Joan Crawford movie. In many cases, that would translate into condescension. But Almodóvar, unlike less talented campers, seems to like women as much as their images. Although Pepa goes through her share of indignities in the course of *Women on the Verge*, one never feels that she, or Carmen Maura, is a victim of the filmmaker. Rather, Maura appears before us as Almodóvar's collaborator. She is on screen for virtually the entire eighty-eight minutes, carrying the picture all the way.

Some critics have noted with displeasure that Almodóvar's films never acknowledge Spain's history. They show us a Madrid that never knew Franco. For my part, I cannot consider this a fault. Almodóvar has in fact filled his work with social commentary, but he has done so with the conviction that laughter and play are liberating. The entertainer, happy to give you whatever you desire, heals through generosity; his silence damns more thoroughly than any curse.

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Of this year's Halloween offerings, my favorite by far was *The Lair of the White Worm*. It gives us Ken Russell in a restrained mood: nothing but some vampirism, a castrated Boy Scout and a choir of impaled nuns. Except for that, it's pretty tame—although there *is* a crucifixion-rape sequence and a sex-and-death fantasy set in an airplane. But that's it, really. Just that and somebody's mother being hacked in two—by the *good* guy—and a scene where a policeman-turned-reptile dances to a bagpipe. Did I mention the part about Oscar Wilde?

The occasion for these shenanigans is Russell's adaptation of a novel by Bram Stoker. He has updated the story to the present, setting it in a rural corner of Thatcher's England where unemployment and anomie are somehow not in evidence, but where old-fashioned class resentments still seethe. The young lord of D'Ampton Manor feels free to dally with the lasses on Mercy Farm and to tease the Scots commoner visiting his fief. He does not realize that the commoner, an archeologist, has dug up something evil, nor does he know that his only fellow aristocrat in the neighborhood, the mistress of Temple House, happens to be high priestess to the monster.

Sporting a wonderfully slinky wardrobe and a great pair of fangs, Amanda Donohoe slithers through the film with barely suppressed glee, alternately dropping herpetological puns and spitting venom. She seems not merely cold-blooded but ultimately as hermaphroditic as an earthworm. Neither female nor male herself, she impartially accepts both men and women as sacrifices to her god, just so long as they are virgins. Perhaps it is this disdain for sexual difference that inspires her at one point to quote Wilde—who was himself likened to a great white caterpillar by one of his less admiring acquaintances. Is Russell letting us know on which side his sympathies lie? You bet. But this is, as I've mentioned, one of his more restrained performances, which means the subtext mostly stays where it belongs while the story charges ahead. Russell is not one to put himself at the service of his sources; but in this case he gives Stoker's novel its due. I suspect the author, showman as he was, would have been delighted. If *The Lair of the White Worm* is still playing in your neighborhood when Thanksgiving rolls around, you might treat the whole family. □

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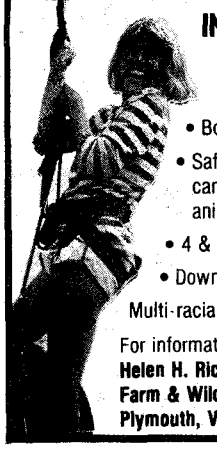

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D				I		S		M		R		U		O
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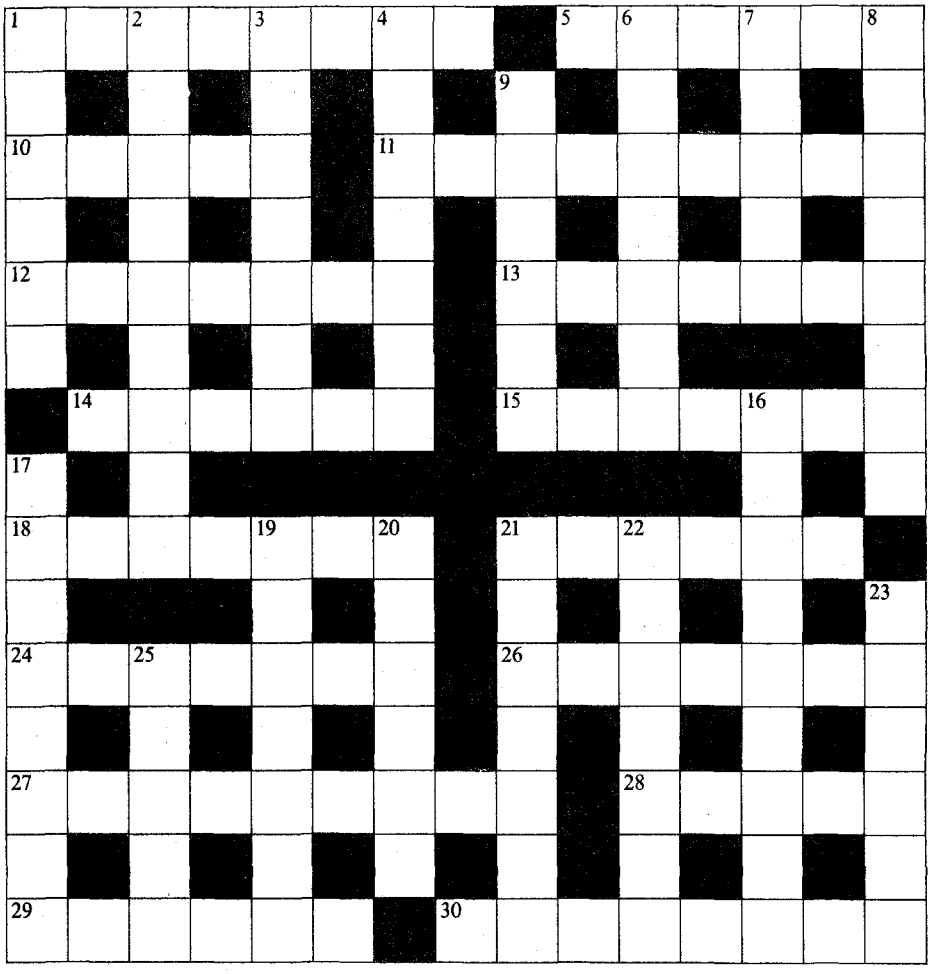
Crossword Puzzle No. 2220

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Firm (but small) sort of apple with a hint of what the criminal might do to better his chances. (3,1,4)
5 Jay at first might make a funny synonym, but I, by the sound of it, should be what it pertains to. (6)
10 The circulation of air to show relative value? (5)
11 Misshapen 9 seems to show the backbone of Italy . . . (9)
12 . . . and offer men the locale of excitement, perhaps. (7)
13 Stirring up a hundred at first would cause a drunken brawl! (7)
14 When people say they're eating out it doesn't necessarily imply it's a cinch, dining on . . . (6)
15 . . . what would have to be a little seafood! (7)
18 Times when people were given bread, commonly. (7)
21 Acted strangly, to a point, sometimes said to be the youngest sons. (6)
24 People in this part of the country might find it nearest. (7)
26 One might show rank distinction when a revolutionary gives a sign of victory to a president! (7)
27 Present opinion? That's what one does with it—at least on paper. (9)
28 A little wood glue, perhaps. (5)
29 Those expecting a hitch might go down them, though they sound like the British type, nominally. (7)
30 They might mark the way, having a chatoyant luster. (4-4)

DOWN

1 An important one from Egypt is in the little restaurant, where you might have coffee. (6)
2 and 25 Conceivably associated with 16-22 by those who bring them. (9,5)
3 One might find it prone to be a help to a body. (7)
4 It might be a stretcher of sorts, with part of the apparel a sticking point. (7)
6 and 7 Carefully examine what some travelers take on the rails, perhaps—at least when they appear on the maps. (7,5)
8 Those suffering from insomnia do, being so. (8)
9 Staple form of what they used to press in books. (6)
16 and 22 The shape of things to come might be less apparent with them. (9,7)
17 Such should be rather transitory, and may fly without space. (8)
19 In the sea, Nemo necessarily encountered one, but it could also be a land variety. (7)
20 The point has no light shed on it—but is still revealed by old Sol. (6)
21 When the poet speaks of her shell-like ear, did he have this in mind—or rather, would it be an inside job? (7)
22 See 16
23 Pulls a log along, perhaps,—although they seem to go with a wind! (6)
25 See 2

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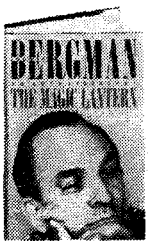

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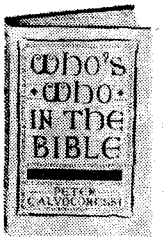

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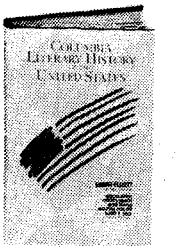

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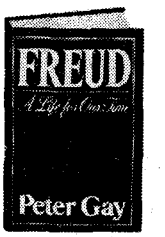

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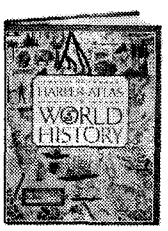

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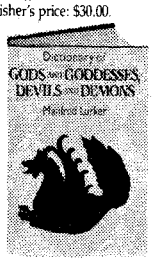

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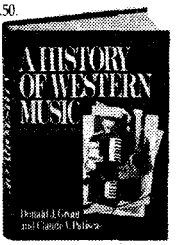

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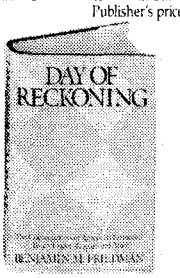

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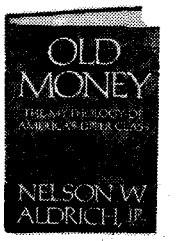

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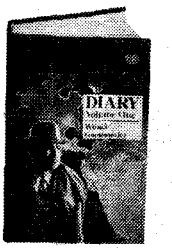

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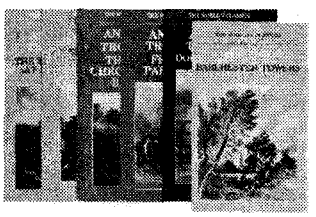

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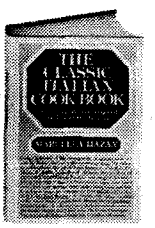

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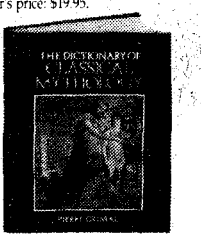

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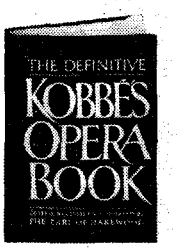

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